HALF A LIE

•

LADY NAPIER
OF MAGDALA

FILE COPY

5/-
NET
CASH

MURRAY'S SHILLING NOVELS

LADDIE
By Gene Stratton-Porter.

NOTWITHSTANDING.
By Mary Cholmondeley.

LOOT.
By Horace A. Vachell.

MR. WYCHERLY'S WARDS.
By L. Allen Harker.

TOWER OF IVORY.
By Gertrude Atherton.

AN IMPENDING SWORD.
By Horace A. Vachell.

FRECKLES.
By Gene Stratton-Porter.

QUINNEYS'.
By Horace A. Vachell.

MISS ESPERANCE AND MR. WYCHERLY.
By L. Allen Harker.

SEPTIMUS.
By W. J. Locke.

THE COMPLEAT BACHELOR.
By Oliver Onions.

THE FLORENTINE FRAME.
By Elizabeth Robins.

FLEMINGTON.
By Violet Jacob.

FROM THE ANGLE OF SEVENTEEN.
By Eden Phillpotts.

File 106

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2019 with funding from
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

https://archive.org/details/halflie00napi

HALF A LIE

NOVELS BY
LADY NAPIER OF MAGDALA
6s. EACH.

A STORMY MORNING.

FIONA.

HOW SHE PLAYED THE GAME.

CAN MAN PUT ASUNDER.

MUDDLING THROUGH.

TO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATIONS.

HALF A LIE

BY

EVA NAPIER OF MAGDALA

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.
1916

Sherratt & Hughes, Printers, London and Manchester

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED]

A lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight.

Tennyson.

WRITTEN DURING BLESSED DAYS OF PEACE BEFORE THE WAR

CHAPTER I.

"Hounds, gentlemen, hounds, please," said the purple-faced huntsman, as the whip held open the gate for his dappled darlings, the dog pack of the Westshire hunt.

Splash, splash, slip, slop, followed the hunt through the miry gateway. Two or three rough-riders schooled young horses over the stiff little stake and bound fence, a horsey lady riding to sell, rode gallantly at it and wished she had not, for her queer-tempered mare promptly refused. One horse lay down in the mud and tried to roll, to the dismay of his scarlet-coated rider, and a vicious animal lashed out and caught a stout farmer on the stirrup iron, his language in consequence scorching the air.

"Kebworth Sticks, I suppose," said an elderly gentleman to one of the whips.

"Yes sir," replied the man touching his cap, "and Holt's Spinney afterwards if we draw blank, no scent to-day, sir."

"I think I have had about enough, Madge,"

said the first speaker to his daughter, who rode up and joined him, "but if you like to stay out I will just jog home, and you can keep Johnson and Ben Bolt."

"Oh, father, I do hope you have not been doing too much," said the girl anxiously, "I would rather come home with you, thanks; I do not want to stay out, really," she said in answer to his unspoken remonstrance.

"You must do as you like, dear," he said rather wearily, "but you might get a good gallop from the Sticks, and the scent is often better in the afternoon."

"I would really rather go home with you, father," she said, and they turned out of the field.

"Mr. Harborough looks pretty bad," said a woman, mounted on a big grey horse, to a scarlet-coated man on a clever-looking Irish mare. They were standing outside the covert that was being drawn, and spoke in low voices.

"I suppose that girl drags him out," she added in her low drawling tones.

"I do not think so," said the man, "Miss Harborough told me that she was very uneasy about her father, but that nothing would keep him at home."

"Six for herself and six for *le cher papa* I

RBC
NcU

expect," sneered the woman. "It would take a good deal to keep her at home I fancy."

"She is certainly the best woman across country that I know," said he. "Such hands, so quiet, takes so little out of her horse too, you never see her showing off, and jiggling about." He smiled under his thick moustache rather maliciously, as he saw the angry colour rising in the fair lady's face.

"Any one could ride across country on such horses as Mr. Harborough's; all you have to do is to sit on their backs," she retorted.

"It takes a little more than that," he said quietly, "but by Jove they've found," and he took his mare short by the head and put her at a stile at the corner of the covert. "Well done, old girl," he said to her as she cleared it with feet to spare, "I think we are in for a lovely thing after all, and we are not sorry to get away from Mrs. Drake, are we?" and he patted the shining neck of his mare, as they sailed away over a ridge and furrow field. Who so happy as they?

Mrs. Drake's grey horse refused the fence. "Beast!" she said, and she brought her hunting crop down on the ears of her gallant steed, who shook his head and backed and bucked, and made up his mind that he would not jump

another fence that day. "I do think that brute might have given me a lead," she said aloud, crimson with rage. "I shall go home, I shall never catch them up now."

Every one for himself, and the devil take the hindmost, is a very salutary axiom to be borne in mind by the votaries of the chase, male and female, and if you cannot open a gate for yourself, or are dependent on a lead over a fence, you had better stay at home dear madame, or mademoiselle, for you are on sufferance in the hunting field, and are often a bore.

Madge and her father rode slowly homewards. It was a dull grey evening with a moaning wind. A flock of fieldfares flew across the road, an agitated little crowd.

"I think it is going to snow," said the girl.

"Yes, I fancy we shall have some hard weather, and I am not sorry, after all the rain the horses are getting a bit stale, the going is so heavy, and I have a good many loose ends to gather in," said her father. His face looked very grey and worn in the waning light.

"I hope you are not very tired, father, I feel sure that you ought not to have come out to-day," and she looked anxiously into his face.

"I dare say not, child, but who knows how

many more hunts we may have together," he said partly to himself, but she heard him, and the tears sprang into her eyes as she turned her head away, and a great lump rose in her throat.

He frowned, reproaching himself for the cruelty of his little speech.

"Cheer up, Madgey," he said. "There's life in the old dog yet. Don't cry darling, I cannot stand it. I shall take a bit of a rest now, and pull myself together."

"I pray that there may be a frost for the rest of the hunting season," said his daughter passionately.

Lights were twinkling in the windows of Harborough Grange as father and daughter rode slowly into the stable yard where they dismounted.

"Jove! how stiff I am," said Mr. Harborough, as he made his way painfully up the flagged path to the back entrance of the house leading to his study, the estate office, and the billiard room.

He slipped his hand through his daughter's arm and she pressed it lovingly to her side. The old stud groom, who had spent the greater part of his life in faithful service to the Harborough family, stood looking after the

pair, an anxious look on his weather-beaten face, a strange moisture in his keen old eyes. Rating himself for an old fool he turned and fell upon his stablemen for failings quite imaginary, and stamped and fumed about his kingdom until his charges were made warm and comfortable for the night.

The servants were bustling about in the fine drawing room, closing window curtains with as much rattling of curtain rings as possible, clattering of fire-irons, and making ready for tea.

Mrs. Harborough sat in state arrayed in black velvet, her white hands folded on her lap, surveying operations with a slight frown on her brow. No one had ever seen the white hands occupied, and the frown was not infrequent in the home circle.

She must have been a very pretty woman in days rather far distant, said her friends. Delicate features, large and cold grey eyes, but the years had played havoc with the childish pout of the rather full lips, once so charming, and an expression of peevish discontent, curiously mixed with complacency, was the chief characteristic of an unsympathetic face. Her fair hair was beautifully arranged in the latest fashion of puffs and curls and waves, and

magnificent rings blazed on the carefully manicured hands.

She looked up with a slightly injured air as her husband and daughter came into the room.

"Tea is just coming in," she said, "am I to wait until you have changed or will you have it as you are?"

The tired man, damp and uncomfortable, dropped into a chair. "By no means wait," he said. "I will just have a cup and go to my room."

"Daddy, I am sure you ought to change," said his daughter, "you are so damp."

"Never mind, dear, I shall just swallow a cup and be off."

"But are you not going to have your egg?" said the girl, distress on her fine face.

"I am too tired to eat, you must eat my egg for me," he said with a wan smile.

"What a fuss," said Mrs. Harborough peevishly. "Ah, here is dear Lady Crosby," she exclaimed, as the door was flung open and a stout, brilliantly-coloured lady swathed in velvet and fur tottered across the parquet floor to meet the outstretched hand of her hostess, and under cover of the cackle and gush of the greeting father and daughter made their escape.

"I will bring you some tea, daddy darling, and your egg, after you have had your bath," said the girl. "I will just tell James now," and she disappeared through a swing door.

"They've been huntin', dear Lady Crosby, you will excuse them, damp and deplorable," said Mrs. Harborough, and she tittered inanely. The frown was evidently kept for home consumption and surroundings, it had disappeared and was replaced by dimpling smiles. "Now do take off your furs, I am dyin' for your news, so sweet of you to look in, what a comfort motors are to be sure. We poor women who don't hunt would be sadly out of it without them should we not? doomed as we are to live in huntin' countries. One or two lumps is it? I forget."

"No sugar, thanks," said Lady Crosby, "noble of me aint it? but I am really gettin' used to it. Yes, what a bore all the huntin' is, is it not? and so many women out every day and all day, and all the huntin' talk in the evenin's, the women worse than the men, and their complexions my dear! I am sure it all bores the men to tears. Crosby is so thankful I don't hunt." (Crosby was indeed.)

"Now do tell me your news," said Mrs. Harborough. "How about Mrs. Drake and

young Courtney? I hear she is so in love with him she can't leave him alone."

"That is quite true, she passed me on the road as I was comin' here, I thought she looked green, something must have gone wrong. She gives herself away in an absurd manner, and they say he is bored to death with her. Got entangled with her in a rather warm flirtation at some shooting place in Scotland, wet weather I suppose, and she won't let him go. But dear me! How stupid I am, I had quite forgotten, surely he was at Miss Harborough's feet at the B. ball, so of course he must be quite off Mrs. Drake."

Mrs. Harborough frowned a little. "Oh, was he? I don't remember. I did not notice anything, and Madge is so close she never says anything, but she seems to me to care for no one but her father. So absurd. Of course one admires filial affection and all that sort of thing, but really! And she ought to get settled now."

"Of course," said her friend. "Twenty-four aint she?"

"Twenty-two," said Mrs. Harborough sharply.

"Well, I must be off," said the other, having exhausted her stock of tittle-tattle more or less ill-natured. "Good-bye dearest. By the way

we are dining at Riversdale on 30th, shall we meet there? No? So sorry. Rather a bore turnin' out at night in the country, but one must be neighbourly, and the duchess was so pressing. Well good-bye," and they pecked delicately at each other's exquisitely tinted cheeks and Lady Crosby tottered away.

As if she would not go on her knees for an invitation to Riversdale, thought Mrs. Harborough sourly. I believe she came here on purpose to brandish her invitation.

CHAPTER II.

"The men that women marry,
And why they marry them will always be
A marvel and a mystery to the world"

so says Longfellow, but surely the women that men marry give equal cause for wonderment, and will always be a mystery to the end of time. Why, for instance, did Mr. Harborough marry Mrs. Harborough?

Is it really the case that beauty is enough for men, for most men? Perhaps no woman fully realises its power over man, as a rule, but one would have thought that a man like John Harborough would have required something more than a pretty face. And yet he took to his arms a vain, ill-tempered, cold-hearted girl, ill-bred, with an outlook the most material and sordid. A lovely face of cream and rose, a pouting child-like mouth, and that was all. He too, who had seen so many girls, he who had moved so much in society, to have made so disastrous a choice. Blind as any bat to the

real nature of the girl, John Harborough dreamed exquisite love dreams of home happiness, of children, of lovely years with the adoring wife, who would be a helpmeet in all duties, who would fill the home that he loved with the best kind of friends, who would be a shining light socially, he thought, as he gazed intoxicated with the loveliness he was so soon to possess.

Long ere the honeymoon had waned he had found her out. The veil was torn from his eyes; he saw her as she was. Poor John Harborough! He put away all his dreams. He was a good man, and he told himself that he only was to blame, and that he must make the best of his bargain. The little blind god fled away for ever.

He bought his bride many lovely presents, and prepared for the worst after his honeymoon. Perhaps he went to the other extreme, when he realized what an utter fool he had been in his choice of a wife, and gave her no credit for any of the qualities with which his enamoured imagination had endowed her, or for any quality at all for that matter, when it broke upon him that she was underbred, incapable of any affection, material, and intensely *bornée*. His manner to her was always perfect, almost too

perfect, polished with the polish of steel. Any woman who loved him would have felt with agony untold that no love lay beneath that icy and studied polish.

Mrs. Harborough, however, felt nothing at all. She was much pleased with herself and her worldly circumstances, and intended to make the most of both.

John Harborough's terror as to the changes that she would make at Harborough proved to be groundless. Her taste had been cultivated and she knew perfection when she saw it, and Harborough was perfect. She meant to exploit it to the full, and to get what she called the right people together.

Her parents were rich people, who had bought a large property belonging to an old family who had fallen on evil days. Her father had made a great fortune by successful operations in the world of finance, her mother was a woman of good family.

Mr. Simpson fully shared the amiable weakness of the Briton in his adoration of the peerage, and deep resentment burned in his breast at his wife's supreme indifference as to the constitution of her visiting list.

"Really James you are rather vulgar," she would say in her low well-bred tones. "What

in the world does it matter whether Lady Twoshoes calls or doesn't? Mrs. Carter has been to-day and is a most pleasant woman."

Mr. Simpson became explosive and left the room. Mrs. Simpson burst out laughing. This was in the days of their installation at Chorlbury.

In course of time his daughter made up to Mr. Simpson for her mother's shortcomings in the way of social ambitions. She was her father's daughter indeed, he thought with pride, and she required little prompting as time went on as to her choice of acquaintances and playmates.

"She knows what's what," he would say exultantly to his wife as he watched her at children's parties, and saw her sitting in corners with titled playmates.

"She is a disgusting little snob," said his wife, "and she will never be anything else; she was quite rude to those nice little Browns."

He chuckled vulgarly.

His daughter's marriage disappointed Mr. Simpson in a measure.

"I had hoped for a title," he said to his wife the evening after the wedding, as he straddled on the hearthrug and kicked his legs about, one

of his habits that inspired his wife with a feeling akin to hatred.

"Did you really?" she said, coolly lighting a cigarette, "I should have thought a Harborough of Harborough good enough for anybody. I cannot think what he saw in her," she said dispassionately, "such a well-bred charming man, of course she is pretty, but she won't wear, and she is very dull."

"Well, upon my word Dorothea," replied her husband angrily, "that is a nice sort of thing for a mother to say of her daughter!"

"I never cared for Diana nor she for me," said his wife. "Why should I pretend to? I have always done my duty by her and now she is off my hands. She has nearly worn me out always clamouring to go to places where we were not asked, and toadying people who did not want us. Why should they? We were at a party once, I forget where, and I overheard that odious Lady Marabout say 'look at those Simpsons, they seem to be butting in everywhere.' Pleasant, was it not?"

Mr. Simpson spluttered. "Well, Simpsons are better than those beggarly Marabouts; I could buy and sell them and their rotten old place to-morrow if I chose."

"I dare say," said his wife, "but perhaps it

is not for sale; it is very nice to be so rich, however," and she yawned.

"I am dead tired, so good-night. I suppose you have given orders about those wearisome wedding presents," and she trailed her still graceful form out of the room.

A strong liking existed between John Harborough and his mother-in-law, but the families saw little of each other excepting at stated intervals, or on solemn feast days.

Mrs. Simpson had an inconvenient if delicious sense of humour, and her daughter tried the large-eyed views of the elder woman pretty highly at times, and her control over her risible faculties almost gave way.

"I would not hurt John Harborough for the whole world," she said to herself, "but dear me! how could I have produced such a snob as Diana?"

CHAPTER III.

The Harboroughs of Harborough, were people of considerable standing, and the county made haste to welcome the couple with a pleasing anticipation of favours to come in the way of shoots, cricket matches and so on. Shortly after their installation John Harborough idly tossed over the visiting cards that lay on the hall table on returning from a motor drive with his wife one afternoon.

"Ah!" he said, his face lighting up, "Mrs. Kerr! I am glad she has been! Such a nice woman, so clever and interesting, not that she ever crams her cleverness down your throat like some of the would-be clever ones. Such a wonderful gardener too. I am so sorry we missed her."

"Oh," said his wife. "How far off is the duke's place?"

She did not fancy Mrs. Kerr somehow, and gardens bored her to tears. The garden at Harborough was a dream of old world beauty, with its clipped yew hedges and processions of

flowers in their seasons, but Mrs. Harborough rarely favoured it with her presence. The gardener "did" the flowers for the house, and she contented herself with visits to the hot-houses, where she sampled the show bunches of grapes, picking berries off them and pinching the peaches in the peach house to the speechless exasperation of poor MacLennan the head gardener. But to return.

"The duke?" said John Harborough, "Old Puddock? Oh, he lives about seven or eight miles off, I should think. She is a terror, vulgar and airified and stupid. She was a nobody, with a little money, and she hooked him at some out of the way place when he was a younger son. He had not much chance of coming in then, but it was a tremendous marriage for her even then. Of course she was 'neither to haud nor to bind' when Puddock came in, and you need not trouble your head about her, my dear; we are not big enough people to expect to bask in the light of her countenance. I like old Puddock, he is always friendly and cheery, but she has her large foot on his neck, and rules him with a rod of iron, up to a certain point. He is a lazy beggar and it saves him trouble."

Mrs. Harborough, however, troubled her

head much about "her grace," as she called her to herself, and spent feverish hours in the night watches wondering whether she would call.

After a not inconsiderable interval, probably resultant on a chance meeting between the duke and Mr. Harborough in the little country town, "her grace" contented herself with despatching her cards to Harborough by the hand of a footman.

Mrs. Harborough fondled them, but a cloud came over her brow as she put them in a conspicuous position in the card tray, for alas, the corner had not been turned down. "Oh how I should love to get on terms with her, to have her coming in and out here; if only I could bring it about," she said to herself. "What do I care about Mrs. Kerrs, and those sort of people?"

In course of time a girl, and some few years later a boy was born to the Harboroughs.

History often repeats itself, and Madge was a replica of her father in character, even as Mrs. Harborough had been a reproduction of her male parent. Madge and her father thought alike, felt alike and saw eye to eye in most things, and also between mother and daughter in this case there was little sympathy, though the girl was good and dutiful to a degree rare

in the present day, when to borrow the witticism of one who knew her world, most mothers have been relegated to the order of the Sat-upon-icas.

The cold-hearted woman repelled any show of affection from the sensitive child who retreated within herself, turning to the father who loved her and whose love she returned with all the force of a passionate nature. Almost from her babyhood she was her father's constant companion. She would sit in his study while he wrote his letters, quiet as a mouse, a picture-book on her lap. She would trot after him to garden, stables, or kennels, until her stout little legs ached, and as the years rolled on she became his solace, the light of his home, the comfort of his disappointed life. She rode beautifully, having learnt to tackle the evil little Shetland pony while yet a tiny child, to the admiration of the old stud groom, also of her father. The hunting season was a long drawn out joy to father and daughter. To escape from the chilling presence of the wife and mother was no insignificant part of the pleasure of those happy days.

Madge was a handsome girl. Tall and slight and long of limb. Honest grey eyes shone from under straight brows, her hair was

brown with a natural ripple, and she possessed the feature so rare among English women, a well-modelled and decided chin, the mouth was sensitive and clearly cut, the nose straight and finely chiselled.

By the way has it struck others that English women have become singularly plain of late years? Fashion, of course, has much to say. Hats worn at an angle that hide what is usually the best part of the English woman's face, namely the upper part, leaving the frequently foolish and open mouth, the teeth, and the runaway chin for the delectation of the beholder. Then how few can stand the parted hair. However, we need not trouble ourselves, doubtless a lightning change of fashion is imminent. Madame la Mode is an inconstant lady.

To return to the Harboroughs. Jack, the boy, was rather delicate. Tall and slender, he had outgrown his strength, hard exercise was anathema to him. Books were his joy, and he disliked horses and guns. He was another disappointment to poor John Harborough, one of the finest shots of his day, one of the best men across country. He told himself that the boy was a muff, and wondered what he had done to deserve such a son. His schoolfellows told

each other that Jack was a rotter, but a good natured beast all the same, and that it was not worth taking rises out of such a silly ass who would give you the coat off his back if you wanted it.

Jack looked up to his sister with a rather pathetic admiration. She never laughed at him; she was always kind and encouraging.

"Oh Madgey," he would say, "if you only knew how I hate riding! I never know what the horrible horse is going to do, and my feet get so cold it is misery! Then the shoots are so hateful! The guns make my head ache, and it makes me sick to hear the hares and rabbits squeal; and father is so disgusted with me, he never says anything, but just turns his back, and I can see by the look of his back that he hates me," and the boy would moan to his sister, his curly head resting against her knee as he sat on a stool at her feet.

"I do not think that father is disgusted with you darling, only he is a little disappointed that his only son does not care for the things that he does so well himself, and likes so much. Perhaps if you were to try and ride Joey, he is so quiet, though he is so big, and he never does anything," said his sister gently.

The boy shook his head, tears rolled down his cheeks, sobs rent his slight frame.

"Don't cry, old boy," said Madge, at her wit's end. "There, you really must not be such a baby, darling. I will talk to father and ask him whether you need come out any more, if you hate it so."

After all, every one does not hunt and shoot, she said to herself, and Jack is so clever with his books that is evidently his line, poor little man. When I think of the yards of poetry he can repeat, such a memory, and so good at languages too. He will be a credit yet, I feel sure of it, even if he is no good with horse or gun. Father will see it; I will talk to him, he is so good and wise.

Mr. Harborough did see it, and Jack was allowed to go his own way, to read his books, to dabble in chemistry and natural history. He loved nature and animals, and had a strange way of making friends with them.

"You will be a sort of St. Francis D'Assisi, Jack," said his sister, as she watched him, a robin perching on his shoulder, a chaffinch fluttering round him taking crumbs from his hand.

Jack had a friend, a close friend who adored him, in the ungainly person of the vicar's son, a

lad of like tastes, a lanky, shabby-looking lad, with a bright clever face, and the friendship was deprecated by Mrs. Harborough.

"Dreadful youth, he looks like a tramp," she said to her husband, as poor Tom Bellew strode down the approach, a great bundle of books under his arm, the sleeves of his old shooting jacket far too short for his long arms, a ragged little terrier at his heels.

"I like him," said John Harborough, "a nice straight clean lad. There is one boy I never will allow Jack to have anything to do with, and that is young Rollston," he added firmly.

"Oh, poor Lord Rollston, so good looking," murmured his wife.

"He is a dirty young scoundrel," said Mr. Harborough. "He has been expelled from Eton, and rightly too."

"Boys will be boys, and the Rollstons!" said Mrs. Harborough.

"Bah!" said her husband and left the room in deep disgust.

Mrs. Harborough did not care for either of her children. She told herself and her friends that children bored her, and that she was thankful that her circumstances allowed of her seeing as little of them as possible.

"How some women can have them running

in and out all day, and all that nonsense about the children's hour! so sickly!" she would say to her cronies, who fully agreed with her. She provided them with every educational advantage, and considered that she had fulfilled the whole duty of motherhood.

Mrs. Harborough had not been able to achieve what she called a come and go between Harborough and Riversdale, the duke's place, and the years rolled on. A haughty greeting at county balls, a frosty recognition and a few jejune remarks at dinner parties and point to point races, and that was all. In London, the distance seemed to increase, and the acquaintanceship became attenuated almost to vanishing point.

A French proverb, of greater than usual mendacity as proverbs go, tells us that all comes to those who know how to wait.

In the case before us, however, Mrs. Harborough's starved ducal yearnings were to be satisfied after very much waiting.

CHAPTER IV.

The Duke of Puddlebury had a brother John, who had allied himself matrimonially with a lady who had adorned the front row of the chorus at the Joviality theatre.

The lady had died, giving birth to a daughter who, as time went on, filled the hands of her father very full indeed. He had himself largely to thank, for he spoiled her sinfully, and then there was the foe heredity, which is so hard to combat, the child's mother, Miss Bobsy Toots, having known no law but that of her own sweet will, and the gratification of all her senses, during her short but flamboyant career on this planet. The naughty monkey-like child was a source of huge delight and amusement to her uncle, the childless Duke of Puddlebury, and he and his brother John would giggle over the tales of her impish naughtiness and self-will, brought by a succession of indignant nurses and governesses.

"If your Grace would smack her well, instead of laughing at the evil monkey, it would be more to the purpose," acridly remarked a

plain spoken lady, who had given Lord John notice and was shaking the dust of his house off her feet. "She won't be much of a credit to your Grace's family if she grows up as she is. People don't think much of the aristocracy as it is, nowadays," firing her parting shot as she left the room.

The brothers sat with open mouths looking at each other. "Come and have a whisky and soda, Puddock," said John, "we shall want one after that lady. Did you ever see such a virago?"

"I expect Viva tried her pretty high. Did she not say that Viva had thrown the ink bottle at her?" said the duke.

The girl developed a strange beauty as she grew up. Uncompromising red hair that stood out from her head gleaming like strands of golden wire in the sunshine. Huge brown, green eyes, dark brows and lashes, and an almost perfect form. Her uncle admired her immensely, and looked upon her impudence and dawning love of the male sex as delicious jokes. To the despair of that essentially middle-class and strait-laced lady, he insisted on the Duchess presenting her at court and taking her out.

"No, Puddlebury, I wont,' indeed I won't.

I do not see why I should," she wailed in her drawling disagreeable voice, but her heart sank.

The Duke began to roar. His face grew red, his eyes bulged. He was an easy-going man as a rule, but under a vast and placid exterior lay a will of iron. The fact was well established that his Grace must be obeyed without his demonstrating any reason why. It was better to do things than that his grace should roar. And now his grace had begun to roar, and at his duchess. She quailed. She felt her courage ebbing. She knew that she would have to give in. She was a bully and also a coward, and at times he could terrify her. She had never stood up to him yet, as she expressed it, but his usually placid good nature allowed her undisputed sway in most things.

The duke was an affectionate man. He was fond of all his brothers and sisters, but he loved John dearly, poor John, who was the least admirable of all the amiable and highly reputable little crowd. John was gouty now, and ill, and worried to death about Viva, who was too much for him. Of course she was young, but it would be better that she should come out. She must be presented and taken out, and John did not know what on earth to do with her.

The Duchess should do it, thought his grace, and he pushed out his jaw. The Duchess did it.

The seasons came and went.

"If only she would marry," groaned her Grace. "I am as tired as a dog," she said to her maid whom she treated with vulgar familiarity at one moment, and with freezing hauteur at another. "Bless the woman, you are pulling my hair out by the roots," as the long-suffering Abigail tried to detach the diamond tiara from the cunningly combined transformation and sparse *chevulure*.

"I beg your Grace's pardon, I am sure. If your Grace would be so good as to keep your head still for one moment, it is just coming. Your Grace must be dreadfully tired, it is close on four o'clock, Miss Viva is so young, your Grace," and the woman's lips twitched a little.

"Here, don't chatter, give me my dressing gown, then you can go. Put the jewels in the safe," said the duchess.

It was certain that men flocked round Miss Riversby as flies gather round a jam pot. Ardent was the admiration that she excited, but again and again the most promising who had been led to the brink of matrimony sheered off. She was a conspicuous figure wherever she

went. Her brilliant hair, her great eyes, scarlet mouth and the exquisite lines of her voluptuous form now in its youthful perfection.

"I don't know what it is about her but she always makes me feel shy," said a woman (not an ill-natured woman) to another as they surveyed the whirling throng at a great ball through their tortoiseshell lorgnettes.

"Yes, I know what you mean. It is not that she is too *decolletée* as things go, I think my dear that it is her hips. You can see the ripple of every muscle as she moves, and she swings her body round in such a way."

"Yes, no one else could," laughed the other. "She is cast in the most wonderful mould I ever saw out of a sculpture gallery. I believe her mother was the same. Pringle offered her £100 to sit to him for a quarter of an hour, for the nude of course, so I was told, but she had other fish to fry and was busy hooking poor silly John Riversby."

"I wonder what will happen to this poor girl," said the first speaker, "I hear the duchess is sick to death of her."

"That don't matter with the duke on her side. That sort of girl always gets the men on her side, and the duke would do anything for John Riversby, who is too ill to do anything for the

girl in the way of taking her out. I am afraid the poor duchess will have to lump it."

They laughed and made their way to the supper room.

"Well Tommy, when is that coming off?" said one man to another as they stood on the doorsteps of the same house in the sulphur-coloured dawn, watching the motor bearing Miss Riversby away.

"Coming off!" shouted the other, "I am going off, my little friend; I am off to Norway to-day, and go down to Hull this afternoon," and he grinned.

"Oh, I say! isn't it rather a shame?" said the first speaker.

"Rot!" said the other. "If I ever marry, which heaven forbid, and I want to marry something as tropical as that, I shall go for the real thing that is naked and unashamed, at one of the ''alls' or the Hilarity."

"Poor little wretch!" said the other, "and after all the cackle."

The other man shrugged his shoulders and lighted a cigarette. So Miss Viva's hand was at present unsought.

Later in the day Viva lay in her bed. She was a lovely object, but a heavy frown drew her straight brows together at that moment and she

was biting her lips to keep the tears out of her eyes. A tray with her breakfast and letters stood by the bedside, and one of the letters, torn open by hasty fingers, lay on the coverlet. It ran :—

> " Dear Miss Viva,
>
> Here are the chocolates you like. I had such a job to get them, but I think they are the right ones. I am just off to Norway to finish up the salmon fishing and shall go after big game afterwards. I am rather fed up with London. Sorry we shall not have any more jolly dances together though. I hope you will have a good time but you are sure to. Ever yours.—T. H."

And that was all! And how about that time in the garden at D—— House? And how about—Ah! How about that kiss? and the girl turned her burning face and bit her pillow. It was not the first time, however, that those beautiful lips had surrendered themselves to an unhallowed kiss. Poor little girl! She was a bad little girl, not all bad, who is? She was a liar, she had proclivities that might develop alarmingly, but she was generous and kind-hearted. She was entirely without principle or self-control. She had had no sort of bringing

up, and she had a craving to be admired by men. She would give herself away without a second thought almost without the asking.

She was rapidly acquiring a reputation far from desirable in the world of London, and her ducal relations had it borne in upon them that London was played out, as far as her chances of matrimony were concerned.

"I don't know what to do with her," said the duchess to her lord. "I have done it now for three mortal years. There is something about her. She looks so improper, even her clothes look improper, though they are the same as everyone else's. Her manner to men too! Her giggle, her head on one side, and it makes me hot all over to see her dance. She seems to melt into the men's arms, and almost puts her head on their shoulders. No, Puddlebury, you need not begin to roar. I cannot go on with it! I suppose she is amusing, the men go into fits over her, but no one will marry her. A man was talking to another one one night and did not see me, I was behind the door, they were laughing about her. She was dancing with Tom Howard who has fled to Norway. I should be sorry to tell you the things they said about her. Cannot John take her abroad for a bit?"

"John is too bad with the gout. He really is not fit to look after her. It would kill him. She would be all over the place at Homburg. We must have her at Riversdale. I will mount her this winter, she rides like the devil, and may pick up some one in the hunting field, poor little brute! I am sorry you don't like her, Em."

Tears of anger and disgust stood in his wife's eyes. She was a vulgar woman and he knew it, but she was a good woman, she had been a good wife to him, and he was fond of her in his way. He was lazy and she took a good deal of trouble off his hands. In the lean years of his early married life she had slaved for him in many odd ways, and he did not like to see her cry.

"Well you shall not be worried with her in London any more," he said. "We will have her down at Riversdale. I can look after her there."

The duchess smiled a rueful smile.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Harborough's health was visibly declining, and father and daughter were inseparable.

Madge felt as if her heart were breaking, but she kept up a brave front for his sake. Hunting was given up, and the girl implored her father to have her own horses thrown up or sold as she did not care to go out alone.

Short motor drives took the place of hunting with the sick man.

"We will go and see Mrs. Kerr, Madge," he would say, and Mrs. Kerr's pleasant house was their frequent destination. She will be a good friend to the girl when I am gone, he said to himself, thinking sadly of his wife's cold unsympathetic nature. She will not get much sympathy at home, poor child. Mrs. Kerr is very fond of her and I am sure Madge will go to her.

Mrs. Kerr was a widow and a very charming personage She had been left a widow while still a young woman, and had never replaced the husband she had adored. Many men had loved her and would fain have married her, but

she set her face steadily against remarriage, and took up her broken life on lines of her own. Many of the pretenders to her favour remained her staunch friends. Rather than lose her altogether they accepted her terms, and outlived their pain. She had arranged marriages for more than one ex-suitor and with very happy results. She was a most unusual woman. A neighbour of hers with a friend who was staying with her were calling on Mrs. Kerr one day, and as they drove away the friend remarked "Why in the world John Harborough did not marry her instead of that woman is one of the things I can never understand."

"My dear, she has set her face dead against re-marriage," said the other. "She adored Ralph Kerr, and she is one of the women whose heart is really buried in a grave. If she had married any one, however, I almost think that at one time she might have taken John Harborough. She is, however, just as well as she is as things are, and she has made out her life. She is well off, and I do not know what we should without her, her clear head and warm heart. She is always so helpful too, and so straight and true. Even the Puddlebury woman thinks a lot of her, as the servants put it."

"Oh! the Puddlebury woman, I ask you! Commend me to a snob," said the first speaker. "I fly when I hear her tiresome, drawling voice. How Puddlebury could!"

"Well, Jane Kerr does not trouble her head much about her Grace. I was staying with her once. I had been worried and went to her for a day or two, she always makes one feel better and more pleased with oneself. Dear Jane! You know what a gardener she is. We were in the garden one day, Jane in a shocking old hat, short skirt and indiarubber boots, watching the gardener transplanting some treasures. The servant came hurrying out to say that the Duchess of Puddlebury had called and was in the drawing room. Jane sent word to say that she begged that the duchess would excuse her and accept her apologies, as she could see no one that afternoon. And her Grace who sends her cards by a footman as a rule!"

"How good for her," laughed the other. "I wish there were more people like Mrs. Kerr. Such a good influence. How fond she is of Madge Harborough."

"Do wonder, Madge is a thoroughly nice girl."

"Curious that she does not marry."

"I think that she rather likes young Courtney.

but I verily believe that she would not leave her father, and indeed I do not know what he would do without her."

"Poor John Harborough, I fear he is very ill. I think his wife quite an odious person."

"So do I." And they began to talk of other things.

Miss Viva Riversby was now established at Riversdale, and much to the fore in the hunting-field.

She was very well mounted by her uncle the duke, and flattered herself that she could cut down most of the ladies of the X. hunt, and not a few of the men. She rode very straight but with little judgment, and she was the despair of the duke's stud groom, who groaned over the fine animals that she "crocked" up as he called it; the season was not half over and at least two of his best 'osses would not come out again. His Grace did not care. Anything to keep her quiet, he said to himself, and she can't come to much harm in the hunting field with a steady and trustworthy groom to look after her, and I am out pretty often.

"I hope you are right," said the Duchess when he delivered himself of the above views.

The men of the X. hunt were a very sporting lot. They were all very civil to the Duke's

niece, but as a rule they steered clear of the hunting lady, and devoted themselves solely and whole-heartedly to the pursuit of the fox, and had eyes only for the working of the hounds.

The pursuit of man was more to the taste of Viva, and though she liked the excitement of riding to hounds, she was a little disappointed at having been unable to lead captive any one of the young men of the hunt. It would make it so much more interesting she said to herself. It always does, she thought vaguely.

One day she lamed her horse. "You must take the 'oss 'ome, Miss and walk him," said the groom touching his hat.

"I suppose I must," she said crossly. "Can't I have the saddle changed on to your horse?" she asked as the thought struck her.

"Could not do it without his Grace's orders, and this 'ere 'oss aint fit to carry a lady; he is a rare puller."

So she turned ruefully away from the hunt down a lane that led into the high road.

Suddenly rounding a corner she came upon young Courtney. His horse had lost a shoe, he also must proceed at a foot's pace. Joy! What a chance for a flirtation, and she had always admired him.

"Oh, Mr. Courtney! May I ride with you? I have lamed uncle's best horse, and must walk him home too," hearing of Mr. Courtney's misfortune.

"Oh certainly, Miss Riversby, with pleasure, but I am only going to Belton, there is a blacksmith there."

"Well so far," she said. "It is so deadly dull alone."

They chatted on indifferent subjects, the young man anathematising his luck and the boredom of the whole thing. He did not care about Miss Riversby. He was beginning to care for Madge Harborough but he never saw her nowadays somehow. Soon, however, this girl's charm over men began to work a little, and he saw that she was very fair, and that the lines of her figure were exquisite.

With practised skill she worked the conversation round to a more personal character. The great green brown eyes sought his, the little hand tried to stroke his horse's neck. The curves of her body were lovely.

The hoot of a motor startled them, and young Courtney recovered his senses. "Mrs. Harborough," he exclaimed, and held up his hand. "She will give you a lift Miss Riversby, I am sure, and your groom can lead your horse."

The girl bit her lip savagely.

The car stopped. The Duke's niece! Of course Mrs. Harborough would take her home! Motors made everything so easy did they not? So lucky she had a spare fur coat in the motor. Would Miss Riversby put it on?"

There was nothing for it, so Miss Riversby slipped her slim body into the comfortable envelope.

Perhaps Mrs. Harborough might be useful, she thought. She might be invited to stay at Harborough. Invitations to stay in country houses were not showered on Miss Riversby. The Duke and Duchess made their usual rounds in due season, and Viva was not included as a rule. Sometimes the Duke made his wife ask for an invitation for her, a most distasteful request and not to be often repeated. The Duke's family had ignored Lord John's marriage; poor Lord John was rather the black sheep of the family, and they did not feel called upon to trouble about the offspring of such a marriage. Many of the family friends took the same line. At the few houses to which she was invited, Viva had not produced a very favourable impression.

"So kind of you," murmured the girl, settling herself luxuriously by Mrs. Harborough's side,

and nestling herself into her furs. "I do hope it is not taking you too much out of your way."

"Oh dear, no," said Mrs. Harborough. "Delighted; it would have been dreadful for you to have had to walk your horse home all that way."

The sumptuous Rolls Royce car glided up to the ducal abode. Mrs. Harborough's infinitesimal and vulgar heart fluttered in her bosom.

"Oh, you must come in and have some tea," said the girl hospitably. "I will run in and tell Auntie." She leapt out of the car and vanished. She returned shortly in a more subdued manner. "Auntie hopes you will come in," said Viva. The duchess had reproved Viva sharply for what she called such an infliction, but saw that it was impossible to get out of it.

Thought, however, is as the lightning flash, and she too was struck with the idea that here might be a means of occasionally disposing of Viva. Every invitation to a country house visit was something gained and Harborough stood high in repute among the untitled aristocracy of the county. A pity the boy was so young.

The drawling voice therefore took on a more cordial tone, and Mrs. Harborough was thanked

quite graciously for her kindness. The Duke came in. Mrs. Harborough basked. Tea was offered and accepted, and Mrs. Harborough regained her car with one fair cheek scorched by the ducal fire, the infinitesimal heart beating high beats of gratification.

She had waited. She had arrived. Intercourse dignified, and strictly limited, was established between the two houses, and Mrs. Harborough was able to remark " Oh when the Duchess was here the other day," and so on and so on. It is a vulgar world my masters.

The " come and go," however, was promptly initiated by Viva.

CHAPTER VI.

We will pass over the closing days of Mr. Harborough's life, his death and the anguish of his daughter. There is enough of sadness in real life in all conscience without harrowing the reader by dwelling on such a theme in the pages of a novel.

As poor John Harborough had foreseen, the girl did not find much sympathy in her home. At first Mrs. Harborough was immersed in the question of mourning and millinery, in which she seemed to take a lively interest, and which turned poor Madge sick. Then peevish discontent ensued, and boredom with the enforced seclusion and retirement as decreed by the laws of society. The girl was entirely thrown back on herself.

In time she sought out her father's friend Mrs. Kerr, with whom she found comfort and strength, and whose affection was as balm to her sore heart. Madge had ridden over one afternoon and was sitting on a low stool by her friend's chair.

"I wonder if I am very wicked, Mrs. Kerr," she said. "Poor old Mr. Bellew tries to help me, but he goes on saying, 'It is God's will!' Of course it is God's will, everything is God's will, but he seems to think that that ought to be enough for me. And then he talks of heavenly choirs, and the new Jerusalem and of rest, and oh! it is all so cold and impersonal and far away. And I cannot fancy father in it all somehow. Rest too! when he hated rest, and was always at work at something or other, doing useful things, throwing himself into all that he did."

The tears dripped slowly down the fair pale face.

"Madge dear, I know it all," said Mrs. Kerr. "But too well! The dreadful ache and the longing for the touch of the vanished hand. I have come through it all. I do not think that as a rule clergymen ever help one much. They never seem to look beyond the letter somehow. There was only one, an old Scotsman, who ever helped me. He acknowledged how trying all the mystery was, but as he said, there must be mystery in religion. 'For mystery is the shadow cast by Eternity over Time.' I felt it Madge, and it was so large and helpful, if you know what I mean, one felt one could leave it at that,

and go on groping. He, dear old man, has solved the mystery for himself now, God bless him. We cannot take all the book of Revelation literally; it cannot be meant that we should. We cannot grasp the things of infinity with our finite minds. I believe that whatever good work we do here we shall be allowed to carry it on, to perfect it, no matter what it is. Do you know the lines Rudyard Kipling wrote after Benjamin Constant's death? Wait a minute, I will get them for you."

She rose and left the room. Madge dried her eyes. Her friend's words had brought comfort to her.

Mrs. Kerr returned. "Here are the lines; I will read them to you."

When Earth's last picture is painted
  And the tubes are twisted and dried,
When the oldest colours have faded, and the
  Youngest critic has died,
We shall rest, and faith, we shall need it—lie still
  For an aeon or two,
Till the Master of all good Workmen shall
  Put us to work anew!

And those that were good shall be happy,
  They shall sit in a golden chair,
They shall splash at a ten league canvas
  With brushes of comet's hair,
They shall find real saints to draw from
  Magdalene, Peter and Paul,
They shall work for an age at a sitting and
  Never be tired at all!

And only the Master shall praise us, and
  Only the Master shall blame,
And no one shall work for money, and
  No one shall work for fame,
But each for the joy of the working, and
  Each in his separate star,
Shall draw the thing as he sees it for
  The GOD of things as they are!

A look of peace came over the girl's face as the noble words fell from Mrs. Kerr's lips.

"They are beautiful," she said, "and I feel that they are true. Dear, dear Mrs. Kerr, you are so good to me."

"Take the book, child, I can get another copy. Good-bye, darling, try and look up. Try and look beyond, where there shall be no more care, or fear, or pain, or parting, or death, and good work to do."

CHAPTER VII.

Time, the great healer, also did his work with poor Madge. Slowly perhaps, but surely, and it became possible for her to think of her father and to speak of him without the intolerable pain at her heart, that had made thought an agony, and speech impossible for many long days.

Mercifully there is great resiliency in youth, otherwise how could life be faced when crushing sorrow comes in the springtime of our days here? The days of mourning, of conventional mourning, were past at the time of which we now write, and again we find Mrs. Kerr and Madge sitting over the tea-table of the former in the pleasant panelled room, that smelt of pot-pourri and flowers. There were books and papers and comfortable chairs among their brethren of severer and chaster design. Beautiful old china in cabinets and a grandfather clock ticking softly near the door. A grey parrot on a perch near the window swore softly to himself and executed an ungainly dance at

intervals for the benefit of the birds outside, whom he hated.

It all made a charming home-like background to the charming woman who was pouring out tea from a Queen Anne teapot, for Mrs. Kerr was still a charming woman though her hair was as silvery as her teapot, and time had graven lines on the broad brow and depressed the corners of the finely cut mouth.

"I am very glad to see you, dear," she said to Madge, "tell me of yourself. I see you have ridden over; you must have had a delightful ride."

"Yes, I came by the woods and across the fields, I was so glad to get out," and she pushed her hat back from her forehead.

"Any one staying at Harborough?"

"Only Viva Riversby; she seems always to be there. Mother has taken a great fancy to her," said Madge drily.

"And you?"

"Well, I cannot say that I like her. There is something about her that I cannot bear, and I feel such a brute, for she adores me and is always telling me so. If only she would not paw. She is one of those people who always slip their arm through yours. It gives me a sort of suffocating feeling."

"I know," said Mrs. Kerr. "I have been through it. It is the same sort of woman who likes to sit on the floor at your feet and who always tries to come into one's bedroom at night to have what they call a cosy talk. I believe myself that any amount of mischief has come from out of those cosy talks."

Madge burst out laughing. "Dear Mrs. Kerr, you always hit the right nail on the head somehow. The difficulty that I have in keeping Viva out of my room!"

"I fancy, poor girl, that she is rather to be pitied," said Mrs. Kerr kindly. "You might do her a lot of good Madge. She has had no sort of bringing up you know. The duchess is bored to death with her, and people do not tumble over each other to have her in their houses. The duke thinks that he has done enough probably in having her at Riversdale and mounting her, and in making the duchess take her about here and there, and in London."

Madge sighed. "Yes, I see all that, but she is such a fool! She does such things, Mrs. Kerr. I cannot think what comes over her sometimes; she seems to lose her head. Imagine her starting bear fighting on the stairs at Fallowfield, where she was asked to stay, and she hardly knew the people. They are rather stiff

you know, and the worst of it was that the duchess had asked if they might bring her. Mr. Fallowes was furious; he hates that sort of thing. Now the duchess is always sending her over to us, and mother makes such a fuss with her, and told the duchess that she was always delighted to have her. She is hateful when there are men about," said Madge angrily.

"What does she do?" asked Mrs. Kerr, and her mouth twitched.

"Oh, I don't know. She paws. The other day she pretended that she had got something in her eye and made Mr. Courtney look at it. Of course there was nothing."

Mrs. Kerr burst out laughing. "How very florid," she said, "and how does Jack like her? Let me see, how old is Jack now?"

A shade of uneasiness crept over Madge's face and a little upright line came between her straight brows. "Jack is nearly nineteen," she said. "Quite old enough to be pawed, but I think he dislikes her. Sometimes, however, I have seen him look at her so oddly. Then he turns away as if disgusted. Jack dislikes girls as a rule. He only cares for boys or men, and he is quite foolish about animals as you know."

Mrs. Kerr looked thoughtful. "That might

all change at any moment," she said, "and it is a pity to have a girl like that about so much."

Madge sighed. "There is another thing about her that I hate," she said. "She cannot speak the truth; I really believe that she cannot help lying, her imagination gets the better of her. You would be surprised at the things she has told me, the proposals that she has had, and not one word of truth in any of them as I have found out."

"Have you had anyone else staying?" asked Mrs. Kerr.

"Only that odious Mr. Glossop. Oh, such a toady and so spiteful! He is a great friend of the duchess; she brought him over to lunch one day, and mother has asked him several times for week-ends. I cannot bear him! I always keep out of his way."

"Madge," said Mrs. Kerr gravely, "don't make enemies. You never know where they may come in. I know it to my cost as I know many other things, my dear. When you arrive at my age and look down the vista of years you wonder at the mistakes you have made, the follies you have committed, the opportunities you have lost," she said sadly. "But to return to Mr. Glossop. He is rather a dangerous man, Madge. You see he knows every one, or what

we in our fatuity call 'every one,' and he is asked about everywhere. I cannot think why, unless he has established a funk, as the schoolboys say, by his spiteful, clever tongue. There is never a bit of scandal that he has not got at his fingers ends, adorned with additions of his own. Don't make an enemy of him, child; it is quite easy to be civil."

"I am afraid the mischief is done," said Madge. "He is so loathsome with his horrid bulging eyes, and fat white hands, and rings. He started by paying me the most absurd compliments, and was always hanging about me, and I am afraid I showed him that I hated it. I feel sure that he is poisonously angry. Do you know, Mrs. Kerr," said the girl, a hot colour dyeing her fine face, "I think he had a sort of disgusting fancy for me! Oh dear! Oh dear! I do feel so alone sometimes! I do so miss Daddy! I have no one now. You know, mother has never cared for either Jack or me. She would be glad if I married any one, and went away, I think. I see so little of Jack now too, and shall see less. He is going into the foreign office; he refused to go into the army."

"Madge," said Mrs. Kerr, "do you mind my asking you, How about Mr. Courtney?"

"Mr. Courtney!" said the girl bitterly, "Mr.

Courtney seems to like being pawed by pussy-cats, and taking things out of their eyes."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Kerr, "the man could not help it! You do not know how unapproachable you can be, Madge. Do not run your head against stone walls, darling."

"Dear Mrs. Kerr you are always so wise and helpful. I must go now. Oh I forgot to tell you that I am afraid that the duchess will get mother to take Viva abroad with us. It will be awful. I shall always have her on my hands."

Mrs. Kerr looked grave. She kissed the girl affectionately and went down to the hall door with her to see her off.

She was very sorry for Madge. She saw clearly how it was with her. The girl's strong high-spirited rather impatient temper, though sensitive to a fault. She watched her fine figure, sitting her horse so splendidly as she cantered across the park, and sighed heavily. How would it be with her? Mrs. Kerr cordially disliked and despised Mrs. Harborough, and it said a good deal for her tact that she had remained on good terms with the shallow vulgar-minded woman, who was so obsequious to rank and so coolly insolent where she dared give way to her peevish temper. Strangely enough

she held Mrs. Kerr in considerable esteem although she was untitled!

How to be of real use and help to Madge was one of the most difficult of problems to Mrs. Kerr. The utter futility of advice or experience from the elder to the younger generation was a fact she had long since realised, and had wondered sadly, as have many others, why it should be so. Such a waste of material, she said quizzically to herself, as she looked back at the hard lessons of past years.

CHAPTER VIII.

Viva Riversby, as we have seen, had established her comings and goings at Harborough, and the duchess had made fullest use of Mrs. Harborough's gushing open invitation to the girl, sending her there whenever it suited her convenience.

Viva's admiration and liking for Madge were not wholly insincere. Madge was so different from any of the girls with whom she had come in contact. The nobility and purity of her character, her grand scorn of all that was mean and false and petty, had impressed the poor little creature who told lies so easily, and whose outlook was so sensuous and material. She longed to arouse Madge's interest, to show off before her, to impress her with her supposed power over men, to startle her. She did not in the least understand Madge's views, but she had an uncomfortable consciousness that Madge stood on a height to which she could never attain.

Madge was very kind to the girl, though she felt that she could never like her, and some-

times of late an uneasy thought had crossed her mind with regard to Jack. Jack had professed to dislike Viva, but once or twice lately Madge had seen the boy's eyes fixed on her when the girl was throwing her lithe figure into attitudes over tennis or lolling in a hammock. A chill seemed to clutch at Madge's heart, a premonition of a great and possible evil and a silent prayer went up on the boy's behalf. Of course he was but nineteen, but time does not stand still thought his sister wisely, and if this girl was to be thrown with him so constantly in his home, so intimate and unrestrained as to intercourse?

This danger, however, was doomed to be nipped in the bud.

Jack loved animals, as we have seen, and had a strange power over them, winning their confidence and affection. Needless to say he had many dogs, devoted adherents, but his especial love and closest companion was a little terrier who had left a paw in a trap, from which Jack had rescued it. It was a friendly little creature, full of pretty little ways, and at the moment of which we write it was in a condition known as interesting, and an object of much solicitude to its master.

The young people were standing about on the tennis lawn at Harborough, Viva, very

pretty in snowy flannel, striking attitudes. Jack was making experimental shots with ball and racquet, the little dog, "Mossy," running after the balls.

A ball rolled in Viva's direction and she picked it up. Mossy, highly excited, leapt up at her imprinting a brown mark on her white skirt with a dusty little paw. "You nasty beast," she exclaimed, and dealt the little creature a savage kick. Viva loved her clothes and fancied herself greatly in her present attire. The little dog gave a cry of pain and dropped on the ground. Jack looked round and saw what had happened. His eyes blazed with fury. He was beside himself. He rushed to his pet and picked her up whining and crying. He turned upon Viva.

"How could you be so brutally cruel, you have killed her," he said turning away. "My dear little doggie. The cruel brute," he said to the trembling little animal.

But Viva heard him. She turned crimson and burst into tears. "I am not going to stay here to be insulted," she said.

Madge rushed after Jack following him into his den. "Jack, Jack! she heard you," she said, "you must apologise, you really must. I don't think dear little Mossy is much hurt. I

think she only caught her hind leg, mercifully; see she is quite bright now. She was more frightened than hurt; she is so accustomed to be petted by every one."

"She might have killed her," said the boy, "the brute, the beast; I loathe her. I shall always loathe her. She is like a wriggling white worm, always twisting herself about. I wish she would go, why is she always here, Madgey? I shall go up to town to-night, I was going anyhow in the morning."

"No, don't, darling, just write a line and say you are sorry, that you did not mean her to hear, to insult her."

"She makes me sick," said the boy, but he wrote a curiously-worded little apology.

Madge delivered the missive. She found Viva in floods of tears.

"I must leave this house," she said. "I cannot stay here to be insulted. I must wire to Auntie to send for me."

"Of course you must do as you like," said Madge. "Jack, however, wishes to apologise, but he did not intend you to hear; he was speaking to his dog. You were very cruel Viva, the poor little dog is going to have puppies and you might have killed her. Jack is so fond of her; of course he was angry and

lost his temper. He can do no more than apologise, however."

Viva wiped her eyes. "The beastly dog spoiled my dress," she said.

"Nonsense," said Madge scornfully. "There is not the faintest mark, a little dusty paw could have done no harm; it is quite dry."

"I hate dogs," said Viva viciously.

"Well, would you like me to send your message to the duchess?" said Madge coldly.

The tears began to flow again. She knew that the duchess would be sure to think that she had misbehaved somehow, and she did not at all wish to leave Harborough; she liked being there. "You are very unkind," she sobbed. "Of course if he has apologised."

"Well we can drop it," said Madge, and left her.

Viva flung herself on her bed, and sobbed aloud. She recalled the look of savage anger in the boy's face, his furious words. She did like being at Harborough so much too. Deep down in her scheming little mind had lain the thought that some day she might reign over this delectable possession. She was young and what were two years, for Jack was young too, and in two years he would, she supposed, come into his kingdom. It would be odd, she

thought, with her usual fatuous vanity, if she could not work on him, make him fall in love with her, bring him to her feet. She had the *entrée* to his home, opportunity, everything in her favour. Mrs. Harborough would like it, she thought. She thought she had made a little beginning, though he was such a cold stick, such an ass, with his beastly animals. Now this hateful little dog had spoilt it all. But she would remain at Harborough. She would accept the apology. It would all blow over in time. So she bathed her eyes and tired her head, and dabbed powder on her shining nose.

Anything less apologetic than her young host looked it would be difficult to imagine as he stood tall and grim on the hearthrug, high-bred and fine looking in his evening clothes.

Viva, attired in a gown calculated to express rather than to clothe her form, came forward with her head in the air. Jack mumbled a word or two something that sounded like "sorry," and took her in to dinner. He did not reappear after the ladies had left the dining-room and next morning he went up to town.

Madge, always honest with herself, as with others, could not pretend to be much afflicted by these happenings. Jack will never look at her again, she thought, and she was right.

CHAPTER IX.

"The South! the South! Oh lucky you," says a friend with her head on one side, sitting in front of a cheerful fire of sea-coal, her face protected from its generous heat by the palm-leaf fan with which she also emphasised her conversation. "How delicious for you! Ah! Give me the South!"

"Well, I wish you were going instead of me," quoth the other. "The South! the South! Such a delusion! Certainly you get the brilliant sunshine, and there is the Reckitt's blue sea, and the dust and the noise, the piercing mistral, or the tramontana, if you prefer it. The weary pink villas among the grey olives, the monster hotels, the roar of the restaurant—the Bill!"

"Oh! but the nice 'arrangements' that can be made at the hotels, so reasonably, my dear!"

"Talk not to me of 'arrangements,' where everything is an extra! Your *café noir* (which is an extra) comes up the colour of burn water in the highlands, you ask for it to be made a

little darker, and lo! 'filtre' appears in your bill 1 franc extra for the darker hue! I am only giving you this as an example, oh friend of my youth!"

"Still they come," she replied waving her palm-leaf.

Mrs. Harborough, Madge and Viva Riversby, were established at one of the great Riviera hotels which announces that it combines "up-to-dateness, tennis and home comforts," also *le golfe* within reasonable distance, for who could exist without *le golfe* within hail, if possible, by tram otherwise.

A good smattering of exalted names figured on the black board at the entrance, which was a fact both grateful and comforting to the soul of Mrs. Harborough.

Viva Riversby was in her element. She changed her dress about five times a day, she played tennis and golf. She shopped. The golf was delicious. Every one so smart, and there were endless possibilities in the game for the display of figure. The Rue Delibes was a perfect joy and so were the tea-rooms.

Mrs. Harborough found many acquaintances worthy of her attention, and there were luncheon parties, tea parties, garden parties. Rather a dearth of the male sex, thought Viva, excepting

on the golf ground. She wondered where they all went to when they were not playing golf or polo. They certainly did not go to the parties.

A good many of the tame cat order of man, male gossips, and scandal-mongers frequented these assemblages and basked in the southern sunshine while they railed at the dust and shuddered in the wind.

There was plenty of scope for tittle tattle at Lapoule. Luscious tit-bits to be collected and stored up and dealt out for the delectation of London in the season.

Madge found to her disgust that Mr. Glossop had taken up his abode at Lapoule for the winter, that he was actually in their hotel.

"I hate him," said Viva. "He is always telling Auntie things. He scrapes up things to tell her, he is always coming to Riversdale. I hate his bulging eyes, he makes me sick!"

Madge kept her own counsel, but thoroughly agreed. "Well, you had better mind your p's and q's," she said laughing.

"Charmin' your having come out, dear Mrs. Harborough," gushed Mr. Glossop. "I come here most winters myself. Lots of friends always about. So easy to run over to Monte too. You are so wise in getting away from the beastly English winter. Dear little Princess Z.

is here. Such clothes! Of course Monty B. is in close attendance. I wonder how that will go. Prince Z. is at Monte, la belle Aurore, don't you know," and so on and so on, Mrs. Harborough thoroughly enjoying the dirty drivel. Mr. Glossop was paying her a visit in her sitting-room, in the hope of tea.

"I suppose, however, Miss Harborough is a huntin' lady, and will be above all our humble joy in the sunshine, and the lovely South," he said rather spitefully. Madge had retired from the conversation into a corner by the window, where she sat looking abstractedly at the palm trees, the moving crowd. It was too late to go out, unfortunately.

"I hate all that huntin'," said Mrs. Harborough irritably, "but of course my husband encouraged it and my wishes are seldom consulted."

The colour deepened on Madge's face. Her father had left directions that a small hunting establishment was to be kept up entirely for his daughter's benefit until she married, as he wished her to hunt. At her mother's wish she had foregone her hunting for that winter, but it should be for that winter only, she told herself with compressed lips.

"Dear me," said Mr. Glossop, sympatheti-

cally, and he thought how handsome the girl was, and a good bit of money too. She had snubbed him, however. He could make nothing of her, but he would be even with her yet. He was not one to be snubbed with impunity. The mother was a fool, but people with places always came in useful. Meantime he would indulge himself, and gratify his spite by sticking pins into Miss Madge.

"Well, I must say Mrs. Harborough, I am rather with you as to huntin'! And oh, the huntin' talk in the country houses, and the women with high water marks on their necks from their collars, their brick-dust complexions, but I must not talk like this before your daughter," he said, pretending to pull himself up, and watching her with his pale bulging eyes.

"I suppose the hunting will go on," said Madge quietly. He bit his lip. Viva Riversby came into the room at this juncture and relieved the situation.

Mr. Glossop at length took his leave, with a vicious look at Madge, who always contrived to get out of shaking hands with him.

How Madge hated it all. She pined for the hunting field, for the maddening delight of the rush through the fresh air, the rhythmic stride of the powerful horse who had never been

known to turn his head from timber or water or bullfinch, who was a joy unspeakable, the darling of his mistress's heart. And to think of him, and of two other lesser darlings, all engaged in the process of eating their heads off at Harborough, while she had to sit and listen in over-heated rooms to the talk of people like Glossop. It was sickening. Had the girl felt that she was of the smallest help or comfort to her mother she would have grudged no sacrifice for her, but her mother had no affection whatever for her, in fact she rather prefers Viva, thought Madge to herself with heartfelt bitterness.

"Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse," says the dreary old Frenchman, and the weeks of their sojourn at Lapoule were flitting by, slowly enough for Madge, but far too quickly for Viva Riversby and many others.

Viva was once more on the warpath.

A young Mr. Peacock was a conspicuous feature at Lapoule that winter, as were his yacht, motors, and money. His father had made a great pile, how, does not concern us, and his son intended to get what he could out of life by its means, and he meant moreover to get his money's worth. He was no pigeon to be plucked, he told himself with a grin. He

was not old Peacock's son for nothing, said one man, who, considerably older than the youth in question, had found that the latter had taken his measure pretty correctly, and that he was wasting his time in trying to make him see that two and two were other than four. He had also been given to understand, by the youth, that *quid pro quo* was the rule of his life.

"The beggar has got such a beastly good head for figures," said this same man to another of the mildly predatory type, who would fain act mentor to rich young men. And so he had, a remarkably good head for figures and a keen eye for his own advantage in all things.

Nature had favoured him in the matter of looks to a certain extent, but physiognomists would have told you that the hard blue eyes were set too closely together, and that cruelty and sensuality might be found lurking among the lines of the rather full close-shaven lips. He was always beautifully dressed in the latest fashion with the strictest attention to the smallest detail. He was tall and his figure was the joy of his tailor, for Mr. Peacock could carry off any thing "even them checks," said that worthy.

He meant to marry. He meant to rise socially, to be in what he called the "top lot,"

and he knew that it would not be difficult. He must be careful, however. He must, of course, have connection, as well as looks. He would look carefully round.

He was extremely insolent in his quest. More than one well-bred girl had writhed with angry fury when she thought about him, something having diverted the current of his attentions from her, and, as he expressed it, "put him off her," she had found herself suddenly passed by, "left sitting," by him.

"I could slay him! I wish I could slay him!" said one of the girls in question to her bosom friend of the moment.

"Well, if you will take up with such a bounder," said the other scornfully.

"Bounder! you idiot! Of course he is a bounder," said the first speaker. "But what is one to do? When Papa dies I shall have two pence a year, paid quarterly, and I don't see myself at Sittingbourne with Alexa, nor could Alexa see me I fancy, and Hugo is such a selfish pig." She dried her eyes and powdered her nose.

"Take Tommy on again," said the other. "He is a good little chap and loves you, he told me so. No one has noticed this thing, nor your

willingness to become a pea hen," and she giggled over her own joke.

"You are a beast, Meg," said the other, laughing too. "I also, however, have thought of that, so you are not original. Perhaps Tommy is off, however."

"No he is not, I know it for a fact."

So wags the world away. It is good to be young; it is good to have two strings to your bow.

CHAPTER X.

Joseph Peacock was really in love at last. Viva's figure had finished him, he told himself angrily, for he had meant to keep a cool head and to look at everything all round before committing himself to the great venture.

But was there ever such a figure as hers? and that wonderful hair, and those eyes! When she rested her head on the handle of the golf club that she had passed behind her shoulders, tilting her chin upwards, showing the long lovely lines of her bare throat, in those open-necked shirts that she wore, and the poise of her lithe figure, he longed savagely to crush her in his arms. She was exquisite, he thought, from the crown of her red gold head to the tip of her little white shoes. But that he, Joe Peacock, who had passed through such fires, should go down before this chit! He smiled fatuously. So this was love! Well, he supposed he could not expect to go scot free. He was as other men. She was a duke's niece, moreover, a great point in her favour. Well,

what diamonds he could give her, fit for most duchesses; how they would blaze on that hair, on that milk-white throat and breast! She would dazzle the world. He could see her in a box at the opera, on the grand tier of course, every opera glass levelled at her. All the women green with envy over her diamonds. She was a beastly little flirt though, but he would have none of that, not he, and a dull fire blazed in his hard blue eyes and the lips of his sensual mouth were compressed. He would stand no nonsense, not he. There was a good deal of the primitive man about Mr. Joseph Peacock.

Madge was sitting writing letters in her bedroom one morning when there came a hurried knock at her door followed by the hurried entrance of Viva Riversby. Oh, what a bore she is, thought Madge, why cannot she leave me in peace for one little hour. How thankful I shall be to go home again. "Well, what is it now?" she said not too cordially, and seeing the agitation on the face of the other, "What on earth is the matter?"

Viva Riversby wrung her hands and moistened her dry lips.

"Madge, I am in a most awful hat," she said in the strange and senseless slang of the day,

"and I don't know how to tell you, but if you won't help I am floored for ever."

"Well, go on," said Madge, "out with it, don't do tragedy queen."

"I have made an awful ass of myself. You know that time when I was so much alone at Riversdale, uncle and aunt were away so much uncle said that I might learn to drive the car. The chauffeur, Jack Gibbs, is really a gentleman you know; he told me all about himself, his father has a place."

"A 'public' I should think," interjected Madge.

Viva took no notice of the remark. "It was so deadly dull," she went on, "that I thought it would be fun to make him fall in love with me."

"Oh Viva! How too disgusting! How could you! Imagine! a chauffeur!"

"I tell you he is a gentleman."

"Nonsense," said the other, "I do not believe a word of it."

Viva burst into angry tears. "You are so unkind," she sobbed. "It was so beastly dull I could have hanged myself."

Disgust and contempt were writ large on Madge's face; the other girl found little encouragement there.

"Well, what happened?" said Madge.

"Oh, I am afraid I have been a most awful ass; you see I was so bored and dull. He is very good looking and really a gentleman, and I have written to him two or three times, and I gave him my photograph with my name on it, and oh, dear Madge! He is here! Here in this town, with a French countess!"

"As chauffeur?" asked Madge.

"Yes, driving her car, and I have had a letter from him. He says that unless I will see him and give him twenty pounds and a last kiss he will show my letters and photograph about; he has heard about what he calls my goings on and my probable marriage, and I shall simply be done for. I have not got twenty pounds, and I dare not meet him, he is so violent."

"Oh, Viva, Viva! surely you have never allowed him to kiss you?" said Madge in profound disgust.

"Yes I did, once, I could not help it. Oh, Madge, help me! Pray help me! Mr. Peacock wants to marry me, and it would be everything for me, and I tell you I shall simply be done for forever if this comes out! He, Gibbs, is coming to the hotel garden this evening and will bring my letters and photograph. What on earth is to become of me? How can I get

twenty pounds?" She sobbed and wrung her hands.

"You deserve to be whipped," said Madge. "Imagine, a loathsome chauffeur, and to be kissed by him! I cannot say what I think of you."

The girl flung herself on her knees and buried her head in Madge's lap. She was utterly unworthy of pity, but Madge's soft heart was never proof against genuine distress. She saw, moreover, that the girl's future was at stake, and that by an act of generous folly she might save her; but she little recked of the cost, of the price she would have to pay.

"Is he coming this evening?" she asked.

"Yes, he is to be at that small gate you know near the steps, at four."

"Well, I will see him and get your letters, and give him twenty pounds, I luckily have them."

"Oh, Madge, I can never thank you," and she flung her arms round her.

Madge thought with a shudder of the chauffeur's kisses and released herself.

"There," she said, "go and get tidy for lunch. You are a perfect sight."

At the hour appointed Madge was at the spot designated. The chauffeur also was there. A

tall well set up young man, with a certain kind of flashy good looks about him. His cap was shoved off his forehead to show a curled fringe. What a beast, thought Madge, how could she?

He stared impudently at Madge, his hands on his hips, his legs apart.

"I have come on behalf of Miss Riversby," she said.

"Oh you have, have you? Well, that is not at all the same thing," said the man.

"I have brought twenty pounds," said Madge, "and will you please hand over her three letters and her photograph? You know there is such a thing as blackmail, which is punishable by law, there are also thick sticks in this country," she ventured.

The man was a cur. He scraped with his feet. This was a foreign land. They might get a fellow knifed, or put away he thought uneasily. He fumbled in his pocket and produced a small packet of letters, and a very dirty photograph which he handed over. Madge saw that the three were there.

"That is the lot,' 'said the man sulkily, "and you can tell that red-headed baggage that I have no use for any more of her kisses."

Madge handed him the notes in silence.

At this juncture a man brushed past them on

his way to the hotel. He paused and looked at them, and Madge saw that it was Mr. Glossop. Her heart sank with an indefinable feeling of fear.

"Aha!" said Mr. Glossop to himself.

Madge made her way wearily to her room. She threw the letters and photograph into her despatch box, which she locked. "I shall just keep these," she said to herself, "and hold them over her if necessary, the nasty little beast, such a man, too! Pah!"

CHAPTER XI.

The Mistral shrieked, the dust whirled in thick clouds along the dazzling white roads, the sun poured hot rays from a dense blue sky. Almost to a moment, every morning, the outside shutters of hotels and villas set up a maddening and rhythmic banging to and fro, the leaves of the palm trees fluttered and clattered in the torturing wind, the olives turned up their leaves and took on a hideous livid grey colour. Piano organs thumped and thudded waltz tunes, in front of the hotels, stray singers and guitars quavered Italian love songs in wheezy tenors. The country people smiled good-humouredly. "Yes, it was the Mistral! Madame does not know the Mistral? Ah!" Everything was ugly, all beauty had disappeared, blighted by the withering wind. Even the fine range of hills, with their serrated outlines, were ugly, their height seemed to be lowered, they had lost their mysterious dignity. Atmosphere was absent, all detail was crude and harshly made out, vegetation shuddered. Flocks of bicyclists

tore along the roads before the shrieking blast, hunched up, crouching over the handle-bars like so many monkeys. Sometimes there figured an adventurous lady among the crowd, attired in loose knickerbockers blown out balloon-like by the wind, the effect excruciatingly funny. It was all nerve-racking, noisy, harsh, and to the unacclimatized not conducive to amiliability.

"Yes, we have the Mistral," said a Frenchman once to the writer, "certainly we have the Mistral, but then, I go to bed!"

Mrs. Harborough's temper was never a strong point with her, and now it suffered decidedly. Mr. Glossop, too, who had established a considerable degree of intimacy in his relations with the widow, was also on edge, and not as forthcoming as usual with his *chronique scandaleuse*.

"I really think that I shall go home," she said to her daughter, "the noise and this hateful wind quite get on my nerves."

Madge breathed a sigh of relief. "Yes it would be pleasanter at home now I think, and a good many people seem to be leaving. I saw three bus loads going away this morning."

"Oh," said Mrs. Harborough, always keen

to be in the forefront of fashion, or what she considered to be fashion, "did you happen to see who they were?"

"The German Transparency was one, and there were two loads of Americans."

"Well, I really think we must go too," said Mrs. Harborough. "I have had enough of the place."

Viva at this juncture burst into the room. She grasped the situation at once, and stood aghast. "Oh, you are not going away?" she said in dismay. "They say this wind will drop in three days, and that it will be lovely. Oh, dear Mrs. Harborough do stay one more week. I play in a golf tournament and I have tennis matches on, and Countess Dolly is so anxious to have me on her side, she will be so disappointed. No one is thinking of leaving yet, only those stuffy Germans, and some Americans who never stay long anywhere. Do, do stay, dear Mrs. Harborough."

"Very well," said Mrs. Harborough not very graciously, "but it must only be for one more week."

If I cannot bring it off in a week, I may give it up thought the girl. I think I am pretty sure of him, but one never knows. I shall try the soft and subdued tack, happy days coming to

an end, and so on, and I must snub Count Fiddlesticks or whatever his name is.

Her manœuvres succeeded. Mr. Peacock succumbed, and fortified by sundry whiskies and sodas brought himself up to proposing point, and was accepted one sunny afternoon. She now adorned his triumphal car, and he took every opportunity of advertising their happy state.

Viva rapturous, though secretly uneasy, longed for the day when they should leave Lapoule. More than once they had passed Gibbs driving his countess's car. The countess evidently was an ornament of *le monde ou l'on amuse*. Exquisite as to complexion, Titianesque as to hair. Gibbs had stared impudently at Viva, so much so that her fiancé noticed it. He noticed most things. He was all there, said his friends.

"Some of these chauffeurs are d——d impudent scoundrels, I should like to cowhide that one," he said.

Viva felt sick, and hailed the day of departure with profound relief.

The duke and the duchess were truly delighted at the turn of events. They were most gracious to Mrs. Harborough, and cordial in a dignified manner to the fiancé.

"Thank goodness," said her grace to her spouse, "she will be off our hands now, what did you think of him, Pud?"

"He is a bounder, my dear," said the duke, "there can be no doubt of that. There are, however, bounders and bounders, whether he is a good bounder I am not quite sure. Of course he has plenty of money, and of one thing I feel pretty certain, and that is that he will keep a tight hand over Miss Viva. There is a look in his eye and a squareness about his ugly mug."

"Well no one requires it more," said the duchess. "We have done our best for her and all's well now."

"He seems to be in a great hurry," said her husband. "We will get it through as quickly as possible, there is many a slip and I am as anxious to get her settled as you can be. Poor Johnny's health is such we might have her on our hands for ever."

The duchess shuddered. The duke had seen enough of his niece and her "pretty ways" by this time, and some carefully guarded remarks had come to his ears. He had taken serious alarm, and was now feverishly anxious to get her safely married.

The wedding was to be from the ducal house, Lord John being now a helpless invalid with

a nurse and a bath chair at Brighton. The duke would give Viva away, and the couple must go to Brighton to receive the paternal blessing.

Preparations were hurried on. Viva was in the seventh heaven. Milliners, tailors, dressmakers, purveyors of delicate transparencies in the way of lingerie, the days were a delicious whirl of trying-on, of rushing hither and thither, of keeping appointments, of paying visits with the duchess, for now that her future was assured and that she had captured a millionaire, it was astonishing how much interest she evoked. Wedding presents came pouring in. Quoth two ladies over their tea.

"Of course she is the Duke of Puddlebury's niece, my dear, and the Peacock man is rolling. I shall have to run to a pound or two I am afraid."

The other made a wry face. "Really, wedding presents have become a frightful tax now. People expect such good things, and when they are all spread out on those hateful sideboards it would never do to have one's name tied to a pen wiper, or something of that sort."

"I suppose not," said the first speaker sadly. "Do you know Janey Strudwick? She sorted all her wedding presents and put most of them

aside, and has been dealing them out ever since. Of course things that no one would recognise, there are always so many of them; she says that she has never bought a wedding present and never will."

"How like Jane! Not much use to us though. I fear we both belong to the pen wiper and chair-back age!"

Joseph Peacock was very blissful, and he told himself that he was very much in love. He was not an ideal lover, but he found some responsive note in Viva, who imposed no restraint upon his rather crude love-making.

He thoroughly enjoyed what he called "running in and out" of the duke's house. It was a joy to him to sprawl on the satin sofas in the little boudoir that was given up to the engaged couple, to flick cigarette ashes on the carpet, his feet crossed on a chair, displaying the latest mode in silk socks. To watch his fiancée flitting about the room, unpacking tissue paper covered parcels containing wedding presents—to call her to him in a lordly manner to be kissed.

Viva was submissive to all that he exacted from her. At the back of her mind there was always a lurking terror lest he should escape her, and the cup be dashed from her lips. She

would bind him to her by every means in her power, by every kind of lure of the senses.

One day he strode into the little boudoir. She did not expect him. She was sitting with her head on her hand; she was tired and a faint feeling of disgust and satiety had crept over her. He laid his strong hand on her shoulder. She started. There was such a noise in the street she had not heard him come in. "I say," he said, "what is all this rotten talk I hear about a good-looking chauffeur. I heard Miss Harborough's name mentioned and yours, but they all shut up like oysters when they saw me. I shall get to the bottom of it, however, no fear, so you had better tell me if you can what it means."

A hand of ice seemed to close round Viva's heart. Had it come?

"A chauffeur," she said faintly. And looking into his face she saw a dull fire in his eyes and his jaw was set. She rose and crept up to him. "Joe," she whispered, "don't ask me! It was Madge! Promise that you won't ask me." She held up her lips to his.

CHAPTER XII.

Mr. Glossop sat in his club window. "Charmin', charmin'," he said, " such a pretty weddin', his grace had his state coach out, whole thing so well done, every one there, give you my word. Tears? no, no tears," in answer to a cynical question. " No one to weep. The man don't seem to have any relations, not presentable, perhaps, dare say, who cares nowadays? "

" I thought Miss Harborough was one of the handsomest girls there," said another man.

" Oh, you did, did you? " and Mr. Glossop fixed his gold pince-nez on his thick nose, and immersed himself in his newspaper.

There was something, however, in his tone that caused the other man to glance sharply at him. I wonder what the beggar has got in his head, he thought. He is a poisonous sort of a beast, always got some nasty shave up his sleeve, the skunk. Mr. Glossop, although he went everywhere, as he would have given you to understand, possessed the faculty of exciting

the strongest desire to kick him among his male acquaintances.

Considerably disturbed in her mind, Mrs. Harborough sat wrapped in unpleasant thought and a comfortable dressing gown in the luxurious privacy of her bedroom. I must say, she muttered, that I don't think that her grace has been decently civil to me considering all that I have done for that girl. I cannot think what she means. The girl's successful marriage was entirely owing to me, and it should have put her under an obligation she could never repay, she mused, sore and angry. The poor lady had been building on the strengthening of the ties between Riversdale and Harborough. Her affectionate gushing had been coolly received. Mrs. Harborough was not thin-skinned, but more than once she felt as if her face had been slapped. As the season went on her discontent increased. Invitations were surely not as plentiful as in former days. It could not be imagination solely, for several houses had passed her over. What could it mean? Her nerve began to fail. So tiresome Jack being abroad. A good-looking rich young man was such a help socially, such a stand-by to his people. One would have all the mothers and sisters at one's feet. There was, however, a

great garden party at D. House, to which she and her daughter were bidden, which brought a certain amount of healing on its large invitation card.

The festal day arrived in due course, and Madge was looking very well in white and gold as they joined the long procession of carriages and motors on their progress to D. House. Arrived at last, after a word to the stately hostess, mother and daughter made their way down the steps to join the brilliant throng on the lawn.

"Oh, there are Janey and Millicent Oglander," said Madge, and stepped aside to speak to them. Their mother saw her coming, and said something to the girls. They nodded coolly at Madge and turned away, their mother slightly bending her head, eyed her with cold criticism.

The slight was unmistakable. The hot colour rushed into Madge's fair face. What could it mean? Lady Oglander had always been so kind, and the girls were so nice. Then it flashed upon her that this was not the first slight that she had received, though she had refused to believe that the others were intentional. It was incredible! In her pride and stainless purity she felt so perfectly innocent of

offence that her head whirled. What on earth could it mean? Her pride was up in arms, but the tears rushed to her eyes.

She had noticed the duchess's languid greeting of her mother at the wedding and her slender notice of herself, but then the duchess was such a snob. Every one knew what an awful snob she was, and how she made use of people. She had made a convenience of them, and now that Viva was married she had no further use for them. That was comprehensible. The duke had been very kind and civil, he was going to take her mother down to have some tea, at the wedding, when the duchess came bustling up and took him away, barely excusing herself. Madge's generous heart swelled with anger for her mother's sake. She had thought such a lot of the duchess. She liked all those sort of boring people so much. It was hard upon her when she had done so much for that little toad Viva. Hanging on at Lapoule entirely on her account. Madge wished that her mother would go home to Harborough, but there were yet a good many things of sorts, and a royal garden party to which they were bidden. Nothing but death would stop her mother from going to that, thought Madge grimly.

The day of the said garden party arrived in due course.

A beautiful day and a beautiful sight. The background of the old palace, the velvety lawns, the silvery lake, the exquisite dresses of the ladies, the quaint uniforms of the royal watermen. The dark and sinister-looking Orientals, the distinguished foreigners. And over all the faces of the guests was spread the deep glow of satisfaction, the ecstatic pleasure of being invited to and of being seen at a royal entertainment. If in some vain little hearts there was much fluttering, and a dim hope of passing notice by the royal hosts, is it not but too true that "we never are, but always to be blest"?

Madge was extremely handsome, but very pale. She followed her mother, looking neither to the right nor the left of her. She would court no more slights that day, she thought with angry pain.

"Madge, Madge, are you going to walk over me?" said a voice, and Mrs. Kerr grasped her arm.

A flood of colour swept over the girl's face. "Dear Mrs. Kerr, how delightful! I never saw you," she said.

"I want to introduce you to my cousin Sir

Clive Delapré, Madge. He has just come home from India."

Sir Clive came forward and raised his hat. He was a fine looking man, soldierly, to borrow a term from the old novels. His face was browned by foreign suns, his crisp hair touched with grey at the temples. A good face, and a strong face. Honest grey eyes looked out from under level brows, the jaw was square and determined looking.

"I want to be introduced to that girl in white, Jenny, you know every one," he had said to Mrs. Kerr.

"Who? Where? What? There are dozens of girls in white," said his cousin.

"But none like that one," said Sir Clive, and she suddenly beheld Madge moving slowly through the crowd.

The introduction duly performed, "May I take you to have some tea Miss Harborough?" he said, and having settled where they should rejoin Mrs. Harborough she went with him.

The girl felt strangely at home with him. They talked of many thing, and he found that she did not belie her good looks in any way. There was a simple directness about her, a quick intelligence, and she was entirely unaffected. Straight as a die I should imagine, he said to

himself. She looked at you with clear pure eyes, and she never made faces. She talked gently and sensibly, and never giggled or said "Rathur."

"That is one of the nicest girls I ever met," he told his cousin. "Tell me about her, I did not fancy the mother."

Mrs. Kerr enlarged delightedly on the theme.

"I wonder how I could meet her again," said Clive.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Kerr. "I think they are leaving London soon, but they may change, things often crop up. Stay! Madge is going to Lady Carlyon's dance to-morrow, I can get you an invitation if you like. I will ask Madge to tea or lunch or something, and we can go and sit in the park or perhaps go on the river one day."

"You are an angel, Jenny," he said.

CHAPTER XIII.

Clive Delapré was a man of good family and multitudinous connections. His father had been a distinguished soldier, his mother, Lady Muriel, a beautiful woman, left a widow sadly early in life with an only child Clive.

The boy adored his mother with a passionate devotion strengthening and intensifying with his years. She became his ideal of all that was perfect and adorable in womanhood, a standard by which other women should be measured, an embodiment of beauty, purity, and wisdom.

I must risk a scornful snigger when I say that Lady Muriel's family was of the old aristocracy. People rather set in their ideas, perhaps, too truly great to be snobbish, or to give themselves airs, yet a little apt to look down their long noses at much and at many who were accepted in a world grown chameleon-like in its changes.

In private they talked to each other a little sadly of "their day," in public they were gently reserved, full of quiet dignity and a charm quite

their own, a breeding that made itself unconsciously felt.

Clive was an object of intense interest to his relations.

His father's people were scattered and distant, and Lady Muriel had drifted back to her own belongings. Their houses were all open to Clive, and a welcome awaited him in each and all of them. Great was the disappointment when he declined to enter one of the ornamental regiments, and elected to join one of those bound for foreign service. Perhaps the smooth and charming circle in which he moved had grown to irk the lad in his vigorous youth. The wheels of life were so perfectly oiled, the best of everything taken as a right, and matter of course, the grooves so clear-cut.

The fighting spirit was in the boy; he clamoured for sterner things for a wider outlook.

His mother did not interfere. She thought in her heart that the boy might be right. She had often pondered as to whether she had not made many mistakes in his training, as most women would, she mused sadly.

Talking matters over with an old friend of his father's, "I think he had better do as he wishes, General," she said. "I sometimes fear

I may have made many mistakes in his training. Perhaps we have made him too fastidious, between us all; I have seen signs of it, and everything too easy and comfortable, and it will be better for him to go clean away and rough it and see the world from other standpoints."

"Yes, and to rub shoulders with a different set of people and get some knocks," said the General. "You had better let him 'gang his ain gait.' The lad is full of good sense and feeling, and you have brought him up right well Lady Muriel. His head is screwed on quite straight, never fear."

"You see, mother," said Clive, "it is not as if there were a big place to look after. All is so cut and dried in our dear home, you have so many at hand to help you, should you require it, and I should like to knock about a bit and do some real soldiering like father."

So he went. He found much that he did not like. He became a good soldier, however. His whole heart was in his work. His men adored him, they knew that he thought about them, cared about them, though his rule was of the strictest, and he was pitiless to the slacker or liar. He would face danger and death without turning a hair, they said, and he never talked about himself. He happened to come

in for a good deal of active service, distinguished himself, and was mentioned more than once in despatches.

He came to be greatly liked and respected by his brother officers. His great physical strength commanded their admiration, and his love of sport, but some of them were impatient of what they called his square-toed ideas, meaning his dislike of loose talk, foul stories and such like. On one occasion one of his brother officers, returning from long leave, arrived primed with tales Rabelaisian and Decameronic, which he hastened to unfold to an admiring and open-mouthed little crowd.

Clive's impatience and disgust grew, as the foul flood rolled on, amid roars of laughter. "I don't think filth is funny," he remarked as they paused for breath after an outrageous specimen that had elicited yells. "Come and play billiards, Jocko," he said rising, and knocking out his pipe. Jocko's face fell. Not for gold would he have missed one of these stories, such a priceless stock-in-trade. Clive shrugged his shoulders and strolled away.

"Beastly prig," said the story-teller.

"Yes, he always was a prim prig and beastly Puritan," said another, "but he is a good chap all the same."

"A pity more of ye are not like him," said the old Scotch doctor. "One would think that none of ye had had decent mothers, to hear ye talk of women. Ye are like hens scraping in a midden. Well, I am off, good night to ye all," and he too knocked out his pipe and went.

They laughed good-humouredly. They all liked blunt old Mac.

"I wonder whether he has ever let himself go," said a man returning to the subject of Clive.

"I don't think so. I don't think he cares about women. He would toil over beastly ground from daybreak to dark on the off chance of an ibex rather than be purred over by the loveliest woman in London."

"Yes, I believe you are right," said another. "I was so amused once up at Simla. Mrs. Blank went for him. She was looking her very best then" ("or her worst") interpolated another. "At one moment he had appeared quite interested, for him, and she thought she had got him. It was at a dance at the Boltons. There was another dance shortly after which would finish him, she thought, and she appeared arrayed for conquest, too lovely, with a triumphant look about her. No Clive, however! She kept watching the door. Little Brown,

whom she had snubbed, was watching her. He got his chance. 'You will miss your best partner, Mrs. Blank,' he said, 'none of us can dance like Delapré. He has got five days' leave and is off after ibex. He said he was glad to escape another rotten dance, one, went a long way. Slow of him isn't it?' She had not time to control her face and quite gave herself away. Little Brown went away chuckling. Clive was evidently no go, and her spite about him would have made a cat laugh. She could hardly contain herself when his name was mentioned."

"Little toad," said a man, "I am very glad, she has done harm enough in her time, played old Harry rather too often. Good night."

The years rolled on. Clive's mother died, and he felt little inclination to go home, remaining on in foreign parts, some remote, some full of danger. A touch of fever and private affairs, however, sent him to England, and a sudden sick weariness of the East induced his acceptance of a job in his native land.

He found many changes. Many threads were broken impossible to join again, and the face of society was so altered as to be almost unrecognisable. He felt himself to be in a

strange country with the younger women and girls.

It was not likely that he would suffer neglect in the world of London, and invitations soon were poured upon him. Many old friends turned up. Sitting in the club with one of them one day they exchanged their views.

" My dear Hobbes," said Clive, " they amaze me ! ! "

The other man grinned. " Yes? Let us see. How long have you been away? " and he began counting on his fingers. "Ah ! " he said. " Well? "

" Well," said Clive. " I sat next a girl at dinner the other night at the Boyds. She was rouged to the eyes. Her arms were bare to the shoulder. She had a small daisy chain instead of sleeves to her gown. There was a feeling of nakedness about her, and my dear old chap, she asked me a riddle that made my hair stand on end ! "

The other man burst out laughing. " I know who you mean. Miss Daisy Blank. She is not a bad sort, but she does make an ass of herself sometimes. Thinks it smart. I am afraid there are lots of them like that, but not all. It is lucky, however, when the harm is all on the surface as with poor Daisy. There are

much worse things. My good Clive, some of the stories! I could many a tale unfold that would cause your hair to rise higher than it did over poor Daisy's riddle."

"I suppose though that one cannot believe all that one hears," said Clive.

"Certainly not, but I am afraid there is never smoke without fire. Of course there must always be wrong ones, but somehow they seem to be more obvious in these days."

"Yes," said Clive sadly. "I suppose that there is never smoke without fire."

CHAPTER XIV.

Mrs. Kerr was as good as her word.

She was no matchmaker in the ordinary sense; she always maintained that it was too great a responsibility to incur, but to draw these two together, to give them opportunity of becoming better acquainted, might possibly be for the happiness of both.

Madge was very dear to her, and she had the highest opinion of Clive Delapré, so with the tact of a thorough woman of the world many meetings were brought about in a delightfully casual manner.

The sudden and mutual attraction that the pair had felt for each other had deepened rapidly on the part of the man. He had been struck in a way most unusual with him by her fair face, as we have seen, and now Madge began to look for his tall figure at balls and parties, a vague sense of happiness pervading her being when in his presence, a blank emptiness where he was not, but like Mary's lamb in the dear nursery rhyme, wherever Madge went Sir Clive was sure to go.

Wherever they went some irresistible force drew them together, and to spend as much of their time together seemed to be their chief object. They danced together, on stifling nights they sat together in balconies or gardens, or in recesses planned by benevolent spiders for confiding flies. There was no love-making. Flirtation was a *terra incognita* to Madge. What they talked about it would be impossible to say, but they apparently found topics, and the society of each other absorbing and all sufficing. It was an odd state of things. It aroused little comment, however. In those breathless days people were too much occupied with their own affairs, winding them up, or picking up pieces. The season was drawing to a close with the usual rush, tailing off into pleasant and more leisurely engagements. Every one was tired to death or pretended to be.

A few days before their return to Harborough Madge went out shopping in Sloane Street one fine morning. Sloane Street, that happy hunting ground for young ladies. To ladies now in the sere and yellow it is not as happy a hunting ground as in days of old, when there were multitudes of nice little shops, patient and amiable attendants behind the counters who took a personal interest in you, and prices

enticing in their moderation. We have changed all that now, and the new and big shops have eaten up the little old shops and the prices have gone up by leaps and bounds. The "ladies" behind the counters are supercilious, and if you do not like their wares it is open to you to leave them alone; it is very boring to have to serve you at all, thank goodness you are going.

Madge was a delightful vision in a pale linen coat and skirt. She had finished her little commissions and stood waiting her opportunity to cross the street.

To her horror a nursery maid with a perambulator and a small child clinging to her skirt made a dash and came rushing across. The child lost his hold of the woman's skirt and fell as she jerked the perambulator on to the pavement. A motor was close upon him when Madge, at the risk of her life, sprang forward and seizing the child by his clothing flung him out of harm's way. Some part of the motor just caught her shoulder causing frightful pain, but she regained the pavement. Something like a cheer went up from the little crowd, and Madge sick and faint hailed a policeman and asked him to stop a taxi.

"Let me see you home, Miss Harborough,"

said a voice. It was Clive Delapré. They got into the taxi. "I hope you are not much hurt," he said.

"It is only my shoulder, but I thought the child would be killed; it was too horrible. The motor was close upon him." She suddenly burst into tears. "What a fool I am," she said, trying to check a hysterical sob in her throat.

"I wish there were more such fools," he said, and he laid his hand gently on hers. Somehow his touch seemed to calm her.

"You will let a doctor see your shoulder, won't you, and without delay? I shall come and ask for the report this evening at your door."

"Thank you," she said simply, and went into the house.

That morning Clive Delapré had called at his cousin Mrs. Kerr's flat at an unorthodox hour. "I came to see if you would motor down to Hurlingham with me this afternoon," he said. "There is to be some good polo. Perhaps we might make up a little party?"

"Alas, I am filled up," said Mrs. Kerr, "hopelessly so. It is sad that the season is so nearly over Clive, it has been rather pleasant, but you have only come in for the tail end of it.

I suppose that last night's dance was about the wind-up. Was Madge Harborough there?"

"Yes," he said shortly, and she thought that his colour deepened.

"Young ladies sometimes shop in Sloane Street in the mornings Clive," said Mrs. Kerr with a malicious little smile, "and I grieve to say that I have an appointment with my dentist in a quarter of an hour."

"Well, I am off," he said. And as we have seen he betook himself to Sloane Street and witnessed the incident.

"There is not much harm done," said the doctor after examining Madge's hurt. "A bad bruise of course, and a certain amount of shock. The country as soon as possible and keep quiet for a bit. Those nursery maids are not fit to be trusted with children. There ought to be a place where they could go with them without going in the crowded streets and where there are no shop windows for them to stare in at. It is a marvel to me that there are not more accidents."

Madge lay on a couch in a dim room and thought of Clive Delapré. They were to move at once to Harborough, and she wondered dully if she should see him again.

CHAPTER XV.

HARBOROUGH was looking beautiful in the summer weather, drowsy and restful. A great peace brooded over the dim grey house and the old world gardens. The grass walks between the tall yew edges, the moss-grown sundials, the gently trickling water, the quaint summer houses all spoke of the days of long ago, when other owners of Harborough had also loved it, and paced its walks finding pleasure and rest in its peaceful surroundings. They also had suffered, perhaps had sinned, surely they had suffered, as all must more or less during this strange journey of life, but all was over and past with them. Where were they now? All was as if it had never been, done with, and forgotten.

Madge was unhappy and restless. Her pride had been stung to the quick, an angry kind of terror possessed her. She was not well. There had been a good deal of shock to her nervous system as well as the painful bruise caused by the motor from which she had rescued

the child. She paced the garden, she roamed the woods. She racked her brain to find any cause for the unmistakable slights that she had received. The crowning point had been reached quite lately, she told herself, in an afternoon call from the Peacocks. The Peacocks had been paying a bridal visit to Riversdale. Viva had done all that she could to dissuade her husband from paying this visit, but in vain. She shrank from it, she shrank from seeing Madge Harborough. She never wanted to see any of the Harboroughs again, she told herself. She did not wish to be reminded of things.

Mr. Peacock, however, was quite alive to the delights of a ducal connexion, and Viva had already found out that nothing would turn him from any course that he contemplated.

"Not go to Riversdale," he shouted. "I never heard of such a thing; of course we go to Riversdale, and on the day that the duchess names. Engagements? Nonsense, scratch them!"

Viva sulked but obeyed. She had begun to be afraid of her husband. He had a way of enforcing his wishes. The glamour of the honeymoon past, he asserted himself. He was a coarse man. If he wanted anything he took

the shortest way to get it regardless of what the cost might be to any one else. Viva found that she had married a man who was not a gentleman, and a man who would rule her and was quite capable of beating her, she told herself in a passion of angry tears. His money's worth was his motto. He interfered with her in everything, she thought, even her clothes must be approved by him. If she appeared in any garment that was not to his taste she was ordered to change it, and she was obliged to obey. Curiously enough his taste was very good, much better than hers. Her jewels were splendid and well chosen.

At present Viva rather admired him, his size, and his masterful ways, but the time would come when he would pile on the last straw, when she would sicken of him, and bend the whole force of her corrupt and crooked little mind to the difficult task of outwitting him and playing him false.

"Of course we must call at Harborough on that old woman," he said to his wife shortly after their arrival at Riversdale, "but I do not wish you to have anything to do with that girl Miss Harborough. I do not consider her a desirable acquaintance for you after what you told me."

"What I told you," screamed Viva dismayed, "what did I tell you?"

"You hinted at something about a chauffeur," he said stolidly, "and you made me promise that I would not ask you for particulars. That is quite enough. We will drop the acquaintance by degrees."

The visit was paid. Madge, cordial and high-bred, received the couple and made excuse for her mother who was indisposed. The extraordinary constraint of Viva's manner, the offhand and pointed way in which Mr. Peacock made it apparent that their visit was to Mrs. Harborough, and that as she was not visible they would certainly not wait for tea, caused Madge to stiffen into stone, and to burst into hysterical laughter as they got themselves out of the room, Mr. Peacock marching out in front of his wife, having coolly nodded to Madge. Viva rushed back and tried to embrace her but met with no response.

The motor hooted and glided away. Madge watched it from the window with unseeing eyes. I shall go mad if this sort of thing goes on, she said to herself. What does it mean? That unspeakable bounder, to dare to speak to me like that, to nod to me as he did. And that wretched Viva whom I have saved from

disgrace. If it had not been for me she would have been cut by every one and that hideous bounder would not have touched her with the tongs. What on earth can I do? I will ride over and see Mrs. Kerr. She is so good and wise she will help me and it will be a relief. I will ride Orangeman, he will be fit to fly out of his skin. The girl ordered her horse. He was very much above himself and gave her plenty to do. She began to enjoy herself.

Yes, Mrs. Kerr was at home and in the garden.

"Do not disturb Mrs. Kerr, I will go out to her," said Madge. "Will you kindly take my horse round to the stables, he is very hot?"

"Ah Madge! Welcome my dear as always. I have just finished this job. Come and sit in the summer house, we will have tea there. Delicious evening is it not? Did you ever see anything like my beautiful ramblers? I am so glad you have come. I have had a wire from Clive Delapré to say he is coming for the night on his way to Scotland."

Madge was silent. The colour rose in her throat and face.

"I see you are still faithful to Dorothy Perkins," said Madge rather irrelevantly.

"Yes, dear Dorothy, she is so profuse, and I

love her yellowy pink; I hate pinks that have blue in them."

"Mrs. Kerr, can you help me?" said Madge. "I do not know how to put it, but the fact is that I am simply being sent to Coventry in a more or less polite way," and then she told her of the Oglanders' behaviour and of many other unmistakable slights and disagreeable incidents, and then of the crowning episode with the Peacocks.

Mrs. Kerr looked grave. "Are you sure, dear, that you have done nothing foolish, nothing that could be misunderstood; was there anything abroad?"

Madge racked her brain. "I can think of nothing," she said, "absolutely nothing; if it had been Viva now," and she stopped short. A servant had come out of the house and was hurrying towards them.

"Sir Clive Delapré has arrived, Madam."

"Ah Clive, delighted to see you," said Mrs. Kerr, "Miss Harborough has ridden over to see me, so dear of her."

Was it fancy on Madge's part or was there really a constraint, a chill in his manner, as he took her hand lightly in his? Was it fancy on her part? She thought not, indeed she became sure of it, and a nameless pain clutched at her heart.

She rose shortly from her seat, tall and stately in her riding attire. "I think I must be getting home now Mrs. Kerr, will you kindly order my horse?"

"Oh must you dear? It is quite early." They strolled to the door.

"Will you let me put you up Miss Harborough?" said Clive, as the great chestnut was brought round.

"Thanks, there is a mounting-stone," said the girl coldly. He drew back.

She settled herself into the saddle, the chestnut plunged and tore at his bridle, but settled down at the sound of her voice and the touch of her light hand.

"Silly Billy," she said to him, and he seemed to understand.

Sir Clive and his cousin watched her out of sight. "Dear Madge," said Mrs. Kerr turning away. "She seems to ride very well," he said, and changed the subject.

Once or twice Mrs. Kerr, reminiscent of her cousin's former and undisguised admiration of Madge, tried to re-introduce her name into the conversation but somehow without success, and his recent enthusiasm was quite lacking. Some neighbours were dining, or she would, she told herself, have got to the bottom of it, and early

next morning Clive Delapré left for Scotland. It is very unlike Clive, she thought, as she turned the question over and over in her mind. He is not usually smitten with a pretty face, and it was not a case of being merely smitten with Madge for he seemed to be thoroughly charmed with her, and so touched by her pluck in saving that child at the crossing. There is something that I cannot make out. I shall find it out, however, even if I have to ask Mary Oglander point blank why she snubbed the girl so cruelly. I cannot bear that Riversby girl, Peacock, I should say. I should not be a bit surprised if people had mixed Madge up in some of her doings. A nasty little creature. I wonder Mrs. Harborough could have her about so much, but anything to toady the duchess.

Mrs. Kerr, however, was a very busy woman, with many engagements and visits, also her yearly cure at the German bath was pending, so Madge and her affairs slipped for the time being, and she did not see the girl again until the autumn.

CHAPTER XVI.

Far away in the West Highlands, in a remote corner at the head of a sea loch, stood a long low white house, white where it was not clothed with the close growth of cotoniaster and ivy.

Pale-blue peat smoke rose in a straight column into the soft air, a fuchsia hedge with a small iron gate bounded the tiny lawn, and divided the little domain from the sea.

Starlings chattered on the roof, cocks and hens picked at the gravel regardless of several rough-haired terriers who sat about with their ears cocked, or lay with wise heads between their forepaws watching a tall man in grey homespun who sat on a bench smoking a pipe and reading the *Scotsman* newspaper.

The little dogs never took their eyes off him. Suddenly, as though at a given signal, they tore along to the gate barking furiously. The cocks and hens screamed in terror and hurried away half flying, half running in an ungainly manner.

There was nothing there, but the boredom of the little dogs had become so intense, their despair at the apparently hopeless inaction of their master so acute, that it must be voiced, and voiced it was.

There was nothing there. Clive Delapré smiled grimly. He tapped his pipe on the arm of the bench, rose and stretched himself. The dogs came pattering round him, joy expressed in every movement of their bodies, in their wagging tails.

"Come along you little beggars," he said, "we will go and look for that old otter," and he went into the house to fetch his gun.

The tide was far out, the tangle waved in glorious brown masses, seaweed the colour of living gold clothed the ink-black rocks. Sea otters made their homes deep down among the piled-up rocky cairns, hard indeed to dislodge, terrible to tackle. Little dogs, and they must be very little dogs to get into the holes, were apt to leave small bits of noses and ears with old "Dobhran" when he was at home in his lair, and his savage growls and snarls from the black depths would strike terror into dogs less plucky than our dear little friends of the west. On this occasion "Dobhran" was not at home,

and I am not sorry said Clive Delapré to himself, I rather hate shooting these fine wild creatures, and I am sure that I do not grudge them a bite out of old Moneybags' salmon, whatever he may do. It pleased the dogs, however, to hunt through the cairns, and Clive loved the little dogs. It was an object too for a lovely scrambling walk.

Clive Delapré was in love, and he had come to the wilds to fight with himself, to be alone, to get over it. Madge had stirred depths in him never fathomed by any other woman. He had known many women, but love in the higher sense of the word had passed him by. Any fancy that had brushed across his life had been of the most ephemeral. Marriage he had never yet contemplated.

In Madge he had found his ideal, so he thought. Purity, high breeding, and a beauty noble in the simplicity of its bearing. Unconsciously he placed her by his mother. His heart had gone out to her over the motor episode, but it was not until she had left London that he realised how it was with him, that he loved her, that he wanted her for his wife. London became very blank to him, but he knew many people, and dinner engagements stared at him that he was too punctilious to ignore, the

season lagged, and society still saw much of him.

He wanted to talk about Madge, to hear her name, but to his utter amazement he found that his opinion of her was not shared by the world in general, that in fact there was something against her. Women with daughters were strangely silent about her. One woman soured and disappointed with a tail of plain daughters, had said to him "Dear Sir Clive, I never say anything about a girl, so unfair don't you know, one thinks of one's own dear innocent things, but I am afraid Miss Harborough is not very nice, no, I would rather not talk about her."

One night at a party her name caught his quick ears. A little foxy, ferretty man, one of the crowd who "go everywhere," was talking to a woman in a red wig with many diamonds. A woman whose tongue was a terror despite a reputation that from the nature of her dwelling-place should have obviated the throwing of stones.

"Ah yes," said he, "Miss 'H.' Pretty ain't she? Still waters run deep though. For my part I would never trust any of the crowd nowadays, especially not one who looks as though butter would not melt in her mouth. But dear

lady, it is quite the thing now for the young ladies to sow their wild oats."

The woman nodded her head vigorously, tapped him with her fan and they laughed odiously.

"To sow their wild oats!" A sick feeling came over Clive as he made his way out into the cool night air. It was incredible! It was impossible that there could be anything against Madge! What did it all mean? Men changed the subject when her name came up, he had noticed it, he supposed they had been spotted at balls. A man had spoken chaffingly about her, but had stopped when he saw Clive, but he thought he had heard something about a chauffeur. It could not be! Then he thought miserably of his friend Hobbes, of his stories of the girls of the day. Hobbes was a good fellow, not a *mauvaise langue* by any means, but there is never smoke without fire as he had said. But peerless, beautiful Madge! the girl he had compared with his mother. The girl he had thought of as taking her place in his home. His brain reeled; he clasped his hot head in his hands. No smoke without fire. The iteration maddened him. Could there be anything in it? The women would of course be spiteful. That horse godmother of a woman, Lady B., who had

bleated about her. Jealous of course of her good looks seeing her own fiddle-headed daughters, thought Clive angrily. No, it did not matter so much about the women. But the men! that was a different matter. That they should bandy her name!

Of course girls were not as he remembered them, and how he loathed them. Their talk, their beastly riding astride, their hideous rough games, the horrible golf women, but there was no harm in all that after all, but the stories of foulness, the horror of that little brute's talk "of wild oats." But Madge, Madge! he groaned aloud. Bah! he was better as he was! He would go up to Loch nan Ua and forget her, but he would like to see her just once more, for he had never seen anyone quite like her. She was often with his cousin Mrs. Kerr; he would run down for a night on his way north on the chance.

He went as we know and he saw her. Seeing her, however, did not mend matters for him. He went on to Loch nan Ua. Clive Delapré was very unhappy. Visions of her as he had seen her at Mrs. Kerr's haunted him. Pride and stainless purity were writ large on her pale face. Every line of her spoke of race, of high breeding. Her proud reticence, her refusal of

his help to put her up on her horse. That was not the sort of girl to lower herself by any unseemly flirtation or doubtful love affair. Not the girl to do anything "not nice." And yet and yet. Clive was miserable.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was a dull heavy summer that year. A succession of close grey sunless days, the air lifeless and enervating. The elms were funereal in sombre greens, their heads like black plumes against the dull sky. The hedgerows were dusty, the birds were silent. There was a frequent rumble of distant thunder, but it died away, and no storm came to break up the oppressive weather.

How deadly depressing, thought Madge, but it will be fortunate if it only remains at that, she muttered, one can do with weather only. An unnamed terror was growing up in her heart, a terror too hideous to be voiced as yet, far less to be faced.

Mr. Glossop had begun to loom large on her horizon. Several week-ends had found him established at Harborough, and the week-ends had spread themselves considerably into the weeks following. Mrs. Harborough was evidently delighted with him. His flow of society gossip, his immense and "smart"

acquaintance, his footing in the great world (according to himself), impressed the stupid, vulgar-minded woman. He flattered her vanity, as he best knew how, she took to consulting him, he became more and more intimate, he was admitted to her sitting-room. Once Madge had sought out her mother, and had come upon the pair unexpectedly. He was bending familiarly over Mrs. Harborough, and Madge thought that his hand was on hers. At any rate he was far too close to her, thought the girl indignantly. They had started apart at her approach, and Mr. Glossop had smiled an odious smile of triumph. Madge noticed too that Mrs. Harborough's dress had undergone a change. Black was entirely discarded in favour of gay colour and adornments of sorts, of doubtful suitability. Her hats are awful, groaned the girl.

A blind horror possessed Madge as she paced her room at night. A helpless beating at the bars against what she shrank from putting into words.

One morning a letter from Jack lay beside her plate. He had been ill at Munich where he was studying German. He had not told her for she would have been fussed. He was better but the doctor had said he must have a thorough

change, and a friend in the guards had offered him a small lodge and some fishing up in the highlands, for a month or so. Would Madge come up there, it would be ripping if she would. She could sketch, and it was a wonderful place for wild birds. Could she do without a maid? The house was tiny, only two women servants. He was going up there immediately.

Ecstasy! thought Madge. How perfectly delightful, of course she could do without a maid.

She imparted the contents of Jack's letter to her mother. Mrs. Harborough's first idea always was to disagree with or carp at any suggestion not originating with herself.

"How odd," she said, "fancy, no maid. A perfect pigsty I imagine. But of course you are of age, and can do as you like, within limits, of course," she added sourly.

"You see, Jack has been ill and wants me," said Madge gently, "so I think if you have no objection I will go."

"It is inconvenient in a way," said Mrs. Harborough. "I have asked some people down for week-ends, but go. I shall perhaps run over to Marienbad and do a short cure. This weather is really unhealthy, and I know several people who are going there," and she

looked down with her head on one side and a heightened colour.

Madge was a good girl, but there were moments when her mother's blushes infuriated her. "Is Mr. Glossop going?" she asked bluntly.

Mrs. Harborough's colour deepened. A mulish look came over her face, and Madge's heart suddenly sank.

"A good many people are going," repeated Mrs. Harborough, "and Mr. Glossop has so many friends in the best society, he may very possibly be going; you had better wire to your brother and say that you will join him," and she rose and left the room.

Euston station! What tales it could tell of poor humanity's comings and goings. What tragedies, what comedies, what heavy hearts have rolled away in its trains, what joyous faces have peered forth from their windows. What loneliness can be suffered in its crowds, what desert could be as lonely? cries the aching heart. What fun is this bustle! giggles thoughtless youth. How strange and varied is life. Joy and agony jostle each other, and Time marches on, on its Juggernaut way. Whither?

Well behold our Madge at Euston station. A comfortable sleeping compartment, a civil

guard, and a disturbed night in the train. Mr. Glossop, Mr. Glossop, Mr. Glossop! rattled in the rhythm of the revolving wheels, and Madge dreamed dreams wherein she stood at the altar and gave Mr. Glossop away to her mother, but the blessed light of day stole in at last, and she flung open the window of her compartment to draw in long breaths of sweet soft air.

A misty rain was falling and grouse were crowing among the heather. How delicious, thought the girl. How lovely to get right away from that suffocation. I almost wish that I need never go back.

Jack was awaiting her on the small platform.

"Hullo, Madgey! how ripping!" said her brother. "I have got a dog-cart here, it will take the whole show, if that is all your kit," looking at a singularly modest pile of luggage on the platform.

"Are you all right again, Jack?" asked his sister. "You never told me that you were ill. What was it?"

"Oh, I got a touch of flu, or something, and kept getting relapses which took it out of one. I am better now, and shall soon be quite fit."

"But you are dreadfully thin, darling," said his sister. "You ought to have told me and I would have come out to you, to Munich."

"You would have been precious sorry for yourself, old girl, if you had. My! What the food was! There was a thing they called *falsche hasenbraten*, false Hare, sounds nice, don't it? and rotten cabbage, and pink veal, and fids of pork! But I polished up my German I can tell you. You could hardly tell me from the Teuton in a crowd of them."

"You were always good at languages Jack. Oh, how lovely it is here!"

They were toiling at a foot's pace up a steep hill road. The still waters of the loch lay at their feet reflecting the purple heather and birch wood with which the sides of the hill were clothed. The wet shore and rocks were of a dull purple and the seaweed lay in breadths of pure gold, a glorious scheme truly for the painter. Curlew wailed, oyster-catchers cried sharply as they flew in little startled crowds across the loch. Black-faced sheep stood about close to the road and stared, turning suddenly with angry sniff to rush away as fast as their little black legs would carry them, stopping now and then in their career to look back at the intruding strangers. A faint smell of peat smoke was in the air.

"Here is my crib," said Jack, and a sudden turn in the road brought them in sight of Jack's

quarters for the time being. A little old-fashioned shooting lodge of bygone days. Mossy, now grown staid and important, greeted them with joyous barks, and a descendant of Mossy's added to the clamour.

"I have put off breakfast, Madgey, so we will have it together. Mrs. Macpherson is a nailer at breakfast, but very good all round," to the sturdy brown-faced highland woman, who smiled and made an old-fashioned curtsey to the new-comer.

"Come in mem," she said; "I will show you your room and bring the hot watter at once. Perhaps Miss Harborough would like a bath? I have the kettle sitting on the kitchen fire and will bring it directly."

A tin tub protruded from under the little white bed.

It was quite an old-fashioned shooting lodge. None of the modern conveniences. It would have been scorned by the luxury-loving modern seekers after sport. No bathroom, no drying-room, no labour-saving appliances, no this, that or the other. Bah! Away with it. Why have such a place on your lists Messrs. Lyar and Swagson? But its owner loved it. He had spent happy days there; he would not have it modernised for the world. It was a relief to

him to go up there with a friend of his own sex. Thank heaven no women could come there. And so pleasant to be looked after by the two highland women who formed his establishment and did him so well, with a nondescript "lad" outside who looked after the pony and the rough but productive garden. A good "lad" of an uncertain age who would do any mortal thing you asked him except milk the cow! There he drew the line. That was no work for a man!

Madge declined the bath and contented herself with a huge basin of velvet soft water, into which it was a pleasure to dip face and hands. No need of water softeners in those parts, dear friends. The little room was sweet and fresh, the soft air, laden with the scents of garden and sea, stole in at the open window. A window which framed an exquisite view of mountain moor and loch, and a wild little river rushing noisily seawards. The little window, however, could act very nicely on the principle of the guillotine, thought Madge, who incautiously put her head out and knocked down the prop of wood that supported the frame in lieu of the customary cords.

"Yes, it is all like that," said Jack, "so nice and simple, so refreshing," and the young pair

did ample justice to Mrs. Macpherson's breakfast, finishing up with scones and brown heather honey in the comb.

" I have never got such good coffee anywhere else," said Jack, holding out his cup.

"And certainly not such a breakfast," said his sister. " I will go and unpack, Jack, and then I shall be ready for anything; no, I am not a bit tired. One could not feel tired in this air."

"All right then, I will just finish tying a fly or two, which I think will fix my friends the sea trout," replied Jack.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Jack was a born fisherman. All other so-called sport was abhorrent to him.

"I don't quite see how you can bring yourself to fish with your absurd ideas about sport," once said a friend whom he had been lecturing on the hideousness of shooting, and of pigeon shooting in particular.

Jack had just landed and despatched a lively sea trout. He stroked his long chin. "No, and I don't quite see it either, inconsistent eh? But fish are different. Cold-blooded to begin with, and they don't scream and cry. My! When I hear a hare scream, I cannot get it out of my ears for hours. I could scream too!"

"You are a rum chap," said his friend.

Jack shrugged his thin shoulders and grinned. "Well, we will leave it at that," he said good-humouredly.

When all is said for and against fishing, and the nauseating saying as to the rod and line aired once more, the fact remains that a good many qualities go to the making of a fisherman.

Patience, gentleness, keen observation, among others, and all these qualities dwelt in Jack Harborough, and others besides. He was not much to look at, perhaps, but he was the most lovable creature on God's earth, thought his sister. A gentleman too, in the best sense of the word, true, straight and reliable. Not very strong as to health, she sometimes realised with a pang, but she hoped and prayed that he would grow stronger with years. He had a vague fancy for a diplomatic career, and was training to that end. Brother and sister were very dear to each other. The want of mother love in their home seemed to have drawn them more closely together, and the girl understood the boy's sensitive nature and could sympathise with his tastes and queer ways. She never laughed at him and he adored her, and listened to her commonsensible words. She never mistook his nervous temperament for cowardice, and strengthened and encouraged him with a wisdom beyond her years. She always figured prominently in Jack's pictures of the future, for they must be a great deal together. She must not go and marry some brute of a man. Why should they not live at Harborough together all their days. She should hunt, and he would start fish-farming and many other things.

"But you will marry, Jack, and then where should I come in?" she said laughing.

"Not I," said the boy. "I shall never marry, it would bore me to death. You are the only woman I can talk sense to. Do you remember that horrible Riversby girl. I used to watch her bending herself about, and wonder when she would break something and squeal."

"Oh Jack!" said Madge, and burst out laughing when she recalled her fears and the boy's fascinated stare at Viva's gyrations.

The weather was splendid, too fine for Jack, however, but there was plenty to do. They would take sandwiches and go out for the day. There was a dried-up loch high up on the hill, a great nesting-place for gulls. They would go and see it, it was rather curious. They went. The scent of the gulls clung to it still, said Madge holding her nose. Deserted nests were everywhere, a few eggs and many eggshells.

"How I wish I had been here in the nesting season," said Jack. "There are so many kinds of wild birds, I should have added considerably to my collection."

Jack was a close student of natural history and his love of nature was intense.

They pored over the deserted nests, Jack

finding much to interest him. "Let us have lunch now," at last he said.

"Yes, but not here," said Madge, "the bouquet is too strong."

"Oh, poor dear! Have I been poisoning you?" said her brother. "Come along, I will race you down hill and we will have lunch by the river."

They found a pleasant spot and ate thick sandwiches and cake in silence.

"I did not know that I was so hungry," said Jack, "have a cigarette, Madgey."

"No thanks, I have rather given it up, such awful people smoke just out of swagger. I saw a girl at a restaurant abroad, she was quite alone, at a little table, dressed in a sort of blazer with a soft hat at the back of her head. She ate an enormous lunch and drank a lot of wine, then she put her hand in her pocket and pulled out a cigarette case. She beckoned to a waiter for a light and lit up, leaning back in her chair surveying the prospect. Not another creature in the restaurant was smoking. It looked too disgusting. Oh yes, she was a lady all right enough and English. It quite put me off."

"I should think so," said Jack. "How have you been getting on at home, old girl?"

"Oh, pretty badly. Mrs. Kerr was a great

comfort; I used to go rather often. She says I cannot come too often, and I really think she means it, she is one of that sort, but she has gone abroad. You know how it is at home, Jack. Nothing that I do or say ever pleases mother. Sometimes I think she really dislikes me, and oh, Jack, that beast Mr. Glossop is perpetually coming down to Harborough for so-called week-ends, but it is often Thursdays before he goes. I did not mean to bother you with it dear, but it is awful."

"Mr. Glossop!" exclaimed Jack. "I hate him. He always tries to be so beastly affectionate to me too, 'My dear boy, my dear lad,' hang his impudence."

"I think he wanted to be beastly affectionate to me at one time," said Madge with a heightened colour, "now he hates me. Oh Jack, I don't know what is going to happen. I hardly dare think. Mother seems to be so taken up with him. He stuffs her with all his society rubbish and gossip, and she takes it all in and is delighted with him."

A furious colour dyed the boy's face. "You don't mean!" he burst out, "but no, it is unthinkable!!"

"It makes me too wretched," said Madge. "One can only hope for the best. Of course

he is years younger than mother, and oh, Jack, think of father! Think of seeing that creature in his place. She has given up wearing black," she added irrelevantly.

Jack was silent. "I shall be of age next year, Madge, and you are of age," he said presently. "If anything so hideous happens, you and I will live at Harborough and I will give him the order of the boot. I found out all about our affairs after dear father's death. Mother has her jointure, and a good deal of money of her own. You have yours, and, as you know, father ordered that a small hunting establishment should be kept up for you until you married. Harborough was to be kept up and not to be let until I come of age, and come into it."

The tears were coursing down Madge's cheeks.

"Don't let us talk about it any more or I shall be sick," said the boy. "Come along, Madgey, you can sketch, and I will fish down towards home. I hid my fishing kit in a cave near here; I will whistle when I have done."

CHAPTER XIX.

The days flew by all too quickly for the brother and sister. The most perfect harmony reigned between the pair. The old habit of adoration and deference to her opinions still ruled with the boy despite his young manhood, almost as in the days when he looked to Madge to shield him from harsh speech and the ridicule evoked by his unsportsmanlike tastes and indifference to the advantages and joys that lay ready to his hand, which he passed by with something like a shudder.

"What a rotter! With the best of hunting mounts for the asking, such as most fellows would give their eyes for, covert shooting that makes one's mouth water, and he goes bug-hunting and bird nesting!" said his contemporaries, bitter with envy, but Jack, albeit shivering under their coarse sneers and their scorn, went his way. There was always Madge, Madge who understood, who encouraged, who was interested, who helped him, whom he could talk to, who comforted him when he was tired

and "flopped," as fellows called it. Later on Jack began to find himself. His powers of mind were unusual. There was a sort of quiet dignity and good breeding about him. It was not so easy to sneer at him. He had a way of turning the tables on you, and of making you feel that if there were any asses about he, Jack, was not of the number. Of course he was beastly clever, everyone knew that, said his detractors. The lad will make his mark in his own particular line, whatever that may be, so thorough, such powers of concentration, said those who knew.

"I wonder you chose diplomacy, Jack," said his sister one day.

"Oh, I don't know. Languages interest me. It is interesting to look into different kinds of minds, and to mix with different races of men, trying to see eye to eye with them. I can chuck it you know if I find it groovey and boring, in a year or two when you and I settle down together at Harborough Madgey. What fun we shall have! We will travel too and collect specimens, and you shall hunt in the winter while I arrange my collections, and write books. You know I have had several articles accepted lately in good publications."

"Have you, dear? Well, it is a delightful

prospect, Jack, but the plans of mice and men, you know."

"I don't see why it should not come off," and there was an odd look of determination about his jaw that made his sister laugh.

In the meantime, however, hideous possibilities were looming, but she would not think of them. She and Jack would enjoy their time together, every hour of it.

One morning a letter lay beside her plate. The post always made Madge a little nervous, what might it not bring? To-day, a foreign letter, but in a charming handwriting, unlike the unpleasant backward slope of her mother's caligraphy. "Mrs. Kerr! Dear Mrs. Kerr!" said Madge. "How delightful!"

"My Dear Madge.

At last my cure draws to an end, and I feel more limp than I can describe. Why does one do cures, especially at my time of life? I feel sure they often do you much more harm than good. Of course if you have over-eaten yourself all the season and so on, by all means go through these sluicings, but I will not describe the processes, and your poor friend cannot be classed among the devotees to what are called the 'pleasures of the table' (how sickening!).

I think, however, that the cure here is extra trying. Of course one has many hours on one's hands between the odious processes, so one has time to think. You cannot settle to anything else comfortably, for off you have to go and do something or other just as you have begun whatever it may be. Well dear, I have been doing some thinking, and I have thought a great deal about you. You know what you told me about your troubles, and the odd and incomprehensible annoyances that had come upon you, Lady Oglander, &c. My dear I fear that there has been mischief-making somewhere, and that you may have made an enemy. I am very sorry indeed that you have fallen foul of Mr. Glossop. I believe him to be a most dangerous person. One of the most spiteful of men, very vain, and most vindictive. He has wormed himself somehow into society and has an immense acquaintance, and marvellous to relate he is a sort of power in his way. I have, however, an idea that he is less *répandu* than he was, which fact will not make him more amiable. He has a wonderful memory, and picks up the very latest stories and scandals going. I was very sorry to hear that he was at your hotel at Lapoule. Dear Madge, has he fastened any of Miss Riversby's doings on you, or tarred you

with the same brush. I hear no good of her alas, and her husband is a terror. To borrow a vulgar saying, she won't get much of a run for her money with him. Think dear, whether you could have got mixed up with her in any way. She is really outrageous, and I heard of strange doings of hers at Lapoule, and there was something about a chauffeur; sounds too low, but I did not hear what it was. Keep up a brave heart, dear Madge, I shall be home soon, and we will sift the matter thoroughly. Miss Riversby (Mrs. Peacock, I should say) and Mr. Glossop were a most undesirable combination, most dangerous I consider. By the way have you come across my cousin, Clive Delapré? He is somewhere about in the West Highlands. He owns property there. How I envy you and your Jack in that lovely country, so far from the madding crowd. Fond love.

Ever your faithful friend,

J. K."

"Think!" Did not Madge think? Did not the hideous truth flash upon her with blinding light?

Her interview with the chauffeur at Lapoule, in that secluded corner! Her handing him the notes, and Mr. Glossop passing by just then

and turning round as if to make sure of her identity. The blatant good looks of the scoundrel, his cap brushed off his forehead to exhibit a curled fringe, the impudent ease of his attitude. He might have been interviewing a maid servant or a midinette. The construction that a man like Mr. Glossop might put upon the incident! What a morsel for him! And he hated her, Madge, she had snubbed his advances, she avoided him! Madge felt as if she would faint. The horror of it! Jack must not know. She tried to compose her face. To her relief Jack rose and stuffing his letters into his pocket said, "I shall go down to the river now Madge, come down there with the lunch if you are busy with letters," and he lounged away.

Madge gathered up the sheets of her friend's letter. The blood beat in her temples; she felt sick and faint. All was quite clear to her. She would tell Mrs. Kerr the whole story. Why should she be sacrificed to Viva? But could the lie ever be exposed, her fair fame shown to be stainless? She, Madge Harborough! Her father's daughter. She who had always been so fastidious, so particular, so scornful of the doings of many of the girls of her acquaintance. She to be suspected of an intrigue with a chauffeur! She could have wished for death.

A deadly sickness came over her. She went up to her room and lay with her face downwards on her bed. Will it be believed that the idea of her interview with the chauffeur being the root cause of all she had undergone had never crossed her mind? Her pride, her purity, her sense of the fitness of things, her haughty rectitude, were such that it would have been inconceivable. She recalled the sudden feeling of fear that she had experienced when Mr. Glossop had appeared on the scene, an evidently interested spectator, but subsequent events and the fuss of Viva's engagement and marriage had crowded the hateful incident out of her mind.

Now she saw it all. Mr. Glossop was taking his revenge, slowly but surely, and she was helpless.

CHAPTER XX.

"Do you know a fellow called Sir Clive Delapré, Madge?" said Jack next morning. "He has got a place in these parts, and some rattling good fishing. I met him when I was coming up here, and I think he said that he knew you, and here is a note from him asking if I would go over there and fish. I have been several times already, and he says that if you would do him the honour to come he would provide lunch for us and show us the best pools. We could row or sail across the loch, old Donald would take us any day. Sir Clive lives just round that far-off point. You see that wooded place," pointing to a dark green blotch on the hill side on the opposite side of the sea loch.

"No, thank you, dear," said Madge. "You go. I am sure that he does not want to have a woman flailing his pools. I would much rather stay here and sketch, and perhaps have a cast in the evening and flip off a few of your flies."

"Oh, do come, Madgey. He is such a nice chap, and you would see some more country."

His sister, however, was firm. She was not sorry to have a day to herself, to be quite alone and to think over her frightful imbroglio. She could not see any way out. How to clear herself. She knew enough of the world to realise how such lies stick. And to think that this vile tattler, this spiteful creature who battened on his execrable powers of pandering to the depraved taste of idle scandalmongering women, was more than likely to become a member of her family, to marry her father's wife, thought poor Madge with deep disgust. Her thoughts travelled in a weary round; there was no light anywhere; the day dragged wearily. She was glad indeed when her brother's return forced her to conceal her gloom and to feign an interest in his cheerful chatter. Sir Clive Delapré was a real good chap, said the boy. He had been so kind, but was evidently put out that Madge had not come too. They had a sumptuous lunch. The place was lovely, much wilder country than where they were. A great glen, between high mountains, ran away at the back of the house. Such jolly little dogs too. Nailers for otters, one had half its nose bitten off, and another had only one ear. Otters were

devils. Sir Clive said they must come over and see them work one day, and perhaps Miss Harborough would come too; or they might fish, whichever they preferred. Would they fix a day, any day that week. Better soon, however, the weather being so fine.

Madge felt that another day with her thoughts alone, such as she had just come through, would be more than she could face just then, and she consented. She would be able to judge whether Clive Delapré had really changed in his demeanour towards herself.

Madge was the least vain of her sex, but she could see how powerfully she had attracted him even on first acquaintance. Of course if a man such as he was had heard those ghastly things about her it would account for any change, she thought with a sinking heart, but she might have only imagined it. She would see.

In the meantime Clive Delapré was alternately cursing himself for his folly in playing with fire, and counting the hours until the time should arrive when he should again feast his eyes on the most attractive face he had ever seen, combined too with the very perfection of breeding and form. Of course he was an ass, and he knew how deceptive looks could be, and the modern girl! What things he had heard

of the modern girl, they seemed to stick at nothing, and this story! Pah! For Mr. Glossop's poisonous inuendoes had taken on ugly forms ill-defined but repulsive to a degree. It would, however, be as well to see the girl again. It might cure him, he thought, with strange fatuity. She would probably have let herself go in the highlands, and wear a knitted cap on the back of her head, a skirt like a pair of trousers turned up at the bottom, and so tight she could hardly walk, also a shirt open in front almost down to her waist as he had seen some, all of which filled Clive Delapré with a loathing almost comic in its intensity. Let her come, he said to himself, he must be cured. This might do it. It was absurd for such a man as he was to be enslaved in such a manner, and by one so unworthy from all accounts.

She came. Tall, slender and graceful, in her simple coat and skirt of navy blue serge, a thick white silk shirt high to the throat with a knotted tie under the close-fitting collar. A broad-leafed felt hat shaded the lovely pale face, and the pure eyes looked out calm and serene from under the level brows. The curved lips were depressed at the corners and there was a little fold between the brows. The expression of the face was over grave for one so

young. There was almost a look of pain at times.

Clive Delapré's heart throbbed madly. He could not believe what he had heard. The very look of her gave the lie to the insidious attacks on her fair fame. He gave himself up to the intense joy inspired by her presence, to the enjoyment of the day. To the winds with all else.

The hours flew by. Exquisite hours. She was so perfectly high bred, there was no self-consciousness, no pose, simple, graceful, cultured. She forgot her trouble for the time and again found herself talking to him with the strange ease she had experienced at their first meeting, as though he had been an old and familiar friend. They fished, they watched the antics of the little dogs hunting in vain for the otter that was not there, and later Madge and Clive Delapré wandered up the banks of the river leaving Jack to fish. They strolled on in the golden evening light, he helping her over rough places, her soft little hand in his, but there was no coquetry in her, she was simple and direct as a child. She talked to him quietly and sensibly, and he told her of his life in strange places, her pure eyes resting on his face. The blood beat in his veins. He longed madly

to crush her in his arms, to tell her that he loved her, to ask her to be his wife. A halloa from Jack aroused them.

"Oh, how late it is," said the girl, looking at the little watch on her wrist; "we must be getting home."

"I have had a ripping day," said Jack, coming up to them, "that last sea trout gave me something to do, I can tell you. Thank you so much, Sir Clive. You promise you will come and try our burn. We will give you lunch, but not such a lunch as you have given us, can we Madgey?"

"I am sure Mrs. Macpherson will do her best," laughed his sister.

They strolled down to the loch side where their boat waited them.

"We will need to pull," said Donald. "The breeze has died down."

The loch was like glass. They took leave of their host.

"Let me help you, Miss Harborough, the stones are so slippery." he said. They pushed off.

"Shall we say Wednesday?" said Jack. "Our time is getting short I am sorry to say."

"Delighted," said Delapré.

He stood watching them, and turned away

slowly mounting the hill, his little dogs capering round him.

"I do not believe one word of those lies," he said to himself, "you have only to look at her."

On Wednesday morning, however, a wire came to Jack. It announced that urgent business had called Clive Delapré to London.

He has heard, thought Madge, with despair in her heart. He has begun to care for me, but he does not trust himself, and he has gone away, for he does not trust me, thought poor Madge, and buried her face in her hands.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE duchess had yawned!

And confound it! Lady Jane Kyloe had yawned also! and worse than all, that brute Jawkins had got hold of his, Mr. Glossop's, latest story, his very own, a story that he thought was immaculate in its virginity, a story that would have carried him over several of the smartest dinner parties, and a week-end, and the brute had told it so badly, and had missed out its most delicate, or rather indelicate point. The beast! He was getting himself about, too! How? You saw his beastly red face and curly black hair everywhere, and you heard him bellowing at quite nice places!

A chill came over Mr. Glossop. What a world it was to be sure! He would go to his tailor and order a suit. It would take his mind off and amuse him. His tailor would be sure to have a lot of new patterns.

He strolled to a well-known sartorial establishment, and was received by the obsequious snip. Mr. Glossop was what his tailor called a "dresser."

"New suit, sir, certainly sir. Have you seen this dove grey? His Royal Highness has a suit of it. Choice, is it not? I will just take your measure again, sir, to make sure. Ha! Hum! I thought so! A little stouter, sir!" consulting the tell-tale tape. "Might I recommend a slightly darker suiting, or a stripe?"

Mr. Glossop turned pale with anger. "What do you mean? Stouter? You must have made a mistake."

The tailor spread out his hands and shook his head.

"I will let you know about the suit later," said Mr. Glossop curtly. "No! Damn your stripes, certainly not stripes!" as the tailor pushed a bale of tweed under the nose of his esteemed customer. "I abominate stripes," he grumbled, as he left the shop and made his way to his luxurious flat.

The tailor grinned. "Another of 'em," he said to himself, "well, there are plenty to come on."

Mr. Glossop locked himself into his bedroom, where a threefold mirror reflected his form. He gazed long and anxiously. It was but too true. His silhouette was altering. Despair! A vista of self-denial, hideous and repulsive. Marienbad! Ha! Marienbad would put it all

right! What a fool he was not to have thought of it before. He returned to his sitting-room a little cheered, and flung himself into his favourite armchair. His letters lay on a table close at hand. He picked them up listlessly. No invitations? No card for S. House? Impossible! Ah yes, here was a card. A rotten tea-party. How odd about S. House! He knew that the cards were out, but of course it would come later. A small party. A party to be seen at, thought he. An uneasy feeling was stealing over him. It had come upon him several times of late. Was it possible that his star was setting? His invitations had certainly tailed off. He must take steps. Feed the Brute (society), but his means, though comfortable, would not admit of entertaining on the scale demanded in the present day by the said Brute. He would soon be broke if he attempted it, he told himself. Society was as the breath of his nostrils to Mr. Glossop. Take away that breath, and he must perish from inanition. He wiped his damp brow. There was only one thing to be done, and it must be done at once, before the damning idea took shape that he was dropping out, that he was becoming of less account, that he must make way for newer, brighter, younger men. He must marry a

rich woman. Who? One woman only had quickened his pulses and stirred his blood. Madge Harborough. He bit his lip savagely. He would never forgive her. Never! He hated her with the bitter venomous hatred of a low-bred vindictive nature. She had not attempted to conceal the distaste with which he inspired her. She shrank from his touch. She avoided him. She never even looked at him. Well, she should have reason to repent of her insolence, already she must have suffered, and he smiled maliciously. But how about her mother? It was useless to think of a rich American, or of beer, or banks, or grocery, or rails. They all went for coronets. Mrs. Harborough was a woman of society, as far as she went, if a stupid woman in a way, and she had certainly not made friends with "our old friend 'PUSH,'" and Mr. Glossop grinned, but he would see to that. It was not everyone who had the talent of society. She was rich. He did not quite know how rich, but he would find out. He thought she had a good bit of money apart from her jointure, and there was Harborough, a nice place in which to hang up one's hat. Hers, until the boy wanted it, and he was in diplomacy, or would be, and might be away for years. Of course Mrs. H. was a good bit

older than he, but what did that matter? He was a master of finance too, and it would be odd if he could not add to his own means very considerably for the coming by and by. Miss Madge would hate it so too.

So ran on his thoughts. Men said that Mr. Glossop was a nasty beast, and they were right. They usually are in such matters. He was one of those odd growths on society that have always been and flourished. No sign of the supposed decadence of the country, such as we are always discovering and wailing over, for were there not Nashes and Brummels and doubtless many others of that ilk, both before and since, and probably yet to come?

He was extremely clever in his own way, and his old friend "Push" never failed him. He kept his finger on the pulse of society, he watched every symptom of change. He had a marvellous memory, and great command of fluent speech and biting malicious satire. He knew his world especially the women of his world. He amused, he flattered, he pandered to them. His vogue, his luck had been immense. He had climbed to dizzy heights, and up to the time of which we write he had sat firmly on his pinnacle. With unerring flair, however, he saw that the time had come, that

the hour was at hand when he must either make way for other, for newer lights, or devise some means whereby he should retain his place. He must feed the Brute. The Brute had fed him nobly up to now, and he sighed. His dinners should be such as to give to think. Such talent! Such combinations! His immense acquaintance, his knowledge of the world, and Mrs. Harborough's money would carry him triumphantly over the threatened danger.

In the meantime there was Marienbad. Two birds would be slain by one stone, for was not Mrs. Harborough to be there, and opportunities galore would occur for the furtherance of his suit. He did not anticipate much difficulty. She liked him, she was by no means coy towards him, and she ached for a footfold other than her present staid and reputable one, in what she considered to be "smart" society.

Dear me! How she had swallowed his society talk, and his second-best stories. She was to be had for the asking, and he examined his profile with a hand-glass, ignoring his double chin. He would disregard his tailor's advice. He would order the light suit, such as worn by H.R.H. As to stripes and dark colours, perish the thought!

So the gallant Glossop went forth to woo,

having ordered the chaste dove-toned suit, "same as 'is Royal 'ighness."

His chariot wheels made music in the ears of Mrs. Harborough, and need we enlarge on the distasteful theme, beyond saying that his suit prospered. There was to be no delay in the nuptials. Mrs. Harborough was to proceed to Harborough, to arrange and to prepare for the inauguration of a new regime, then a sojourn in London for necessary legal matters, and the interesting pair would be made one.

The blow was hideous but not unexpected by Madge and Jack. The boy was speechless with anger, the unsuitability was so gross, he declared, when he was able to articulate; the girl was sick with disgust, but there was nothing to be done.

They awaited the arrival of their mother at Harborough.

For the first time in her life Mrs. Harborough felt afraid of her children. Her affected giggle died in her throat. Their reception of her was of the iciest. She tried to resume her authoritative manner.

"Well! Really, I think I might expect a little expression of pleasure at my return," she said, "you both stand there glaring at me in the most remarkable manner. Why do they

not bring tea? What has come over the house I should like to know. Ring the bell."

"A good deal seems to have come over the house, mother," said the boy. "A good deal that we cannot think pleasant. To see a man like Mr. Glossop in my father's place, you can hardly imagine will be pleasant to Madge or to me."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Harborough, growing very red. "I am still a young woman, and it was to be expected that I should marry again."

"But not Mr. Glossop!" ejaculated Jack. "You may be young, mother, but Mr. Glossop is very much younger."

Mrs. Harborough put her handkerchief to her mouth to hide the trembling of her lips, and made an inarticulate exclamation. Jack continued,

"I shall be of age next year," he said, "and I may wish to occupy Harborough myself. I suppose that I may ask that my father's rooms shall be unoccupied and locked up until then?"

Mrs. Harborough flushed angrily. "I am altering all the former arrangement of the house, and shall move my own bedroom to the south bow," she said, "though I fail to see why you should presume as you are doing. The rooms in question, however, shall not be

occupied, and your sister, of course, retains her own."

Madge was silent. She had uttered no word. "I hope that Madge will live with me when I take possession of Harborough," said Jack, "until then I suppose she will be obliged to suffer, and to see Mr. Glossop in our father's place."

Mrs. Harborough burst into angry tears. "Your behaviour to me is monstrous," she said. She was completely cowed. She was a bully and she was also a coward, and the unexpected front presented by her offspring unnerved her. Jack and his sister showed no signs of softening and left the room.

Mrs. Harborough went up to London. She was a stupid woman in many ways, but at the same time rather shrewd, and had sound ideas on the subject of finance. She contrived, with the aid of her lawyers, to secure her moneys carefully against any outside interference, leaving all entirely at her own disposal. It is not that I do not trust Ferdinand, she said to herself, but one never knows.

Mr. Glossop rejoiced in the name of Ferdinand.

"Well, how have they behaved?" asked Ferdinand of his fiancée.

He was dining with her at her hotel. Her eyes were red, also her nose, and she had altogether an overblown appearance, he thought, attired as she was in a gown of the tea-gown order, of a rather unbecoming shade of mauve. "I hope she isn't goin' to let herself go, she looks 100 in that thing," he thought disgustedly.

Mrs. Harborough dabbed her eyes and sniffed. "Oh, so badly. So unkind. Jack threatens to turn me out of Harborough, when he comes of age, and to have Madge to live with him there, so I gathered."

Mr. Glossop's jaw fell. Harborough had been one of his cards.

"How naughty of them," he said smiling benevolently.

No one ever knew what was the inwardness of Mr. Glossop's mind at any time. He appeared to treat Mrs. Harborough's tearful communication as a joke. "We must see if poor step-papa cannot get round the dears," he said, but bitter anger was in his heart, and a creeping doubt.

CHAPTER XXII.

The wedding took place in London.

A small but most select company attended it. There is not much going on just now, it would be good-natured to go, was the general idea, but poor dear Mr. Glossop had become just the least little bit of a bore, had he not? They agreed. However, Mrs. Harborough was rich, and doubtless there would be dinners and so on later on. No better judge of a menu anywhere than Mr. Glossop, and after all he knew everyone, so must not be looked upon as a negligible quantity, as yet at any rate. Better wait and see. So said the female fraction of the sorry world that he loved, as they went to the wedding and partook of the sumptuous tea inspired by the bridegroom and provided by the bride.

The happy pair were to take a wedding jaunt to Paris. There were new and highly-spiced plays to be seen and criticised, and made notes of for future conversational purposes, and Mrs. Glossop could further reinforce her already magnificent wardrobe under his auspices, her

taste leaning slightly more towards the flamboyant and youthful than approved by her Ferdinand. Some of her hats must be burnt, he decided.

Madge and Jack had refused to go to the wedding. Jack had started off back to Munich to continue his studies, and Madge caught a convenient cold and retired to bed at Harborough.

Her mother had left a good deal on her hands, to be settled and arranged in her absence. Some of the old servants were leaving, a few stayed on, Madge with tears in her eyes receiving some of the resignations.

"Begging your pardon, Miss, I could not bear to see Mr. Glossop lording it here in Master's place," said the old butler, "and moreover I don't think that me and Mr. Glossop would get on."

"Very well, White," said the girl. "My mother told me to ask you. I am very sorry. You will let me hear from you from time to time. Shall you take another place?"

"No Miss. Me and cook has our eyes on a small lodging-house in Bolton Street. So we shall just get married and start it. We have saved a bit in our five and twenty years' service with your family Miss, and a good place it has

been until," and White coughed discreetly, "but there is nothing that me and cook would not do for you Miss, and for the young master."

Tears stole down Madge's pale face. She held out her hand, which White took delicately in his.

"Thank you, Miss," he said and left the room.

"Cook" would be a great loss thought Madge, bitterly, such a good honest woman, but doubtless Mr. Glossop would replace her with some one more to his taste, less "old-fashioned" perhaps. Odious man, I hope she will poison him, thought the girl savagely, and she clasped her aching head in her hands.

Mrs. Kerr was expected to return to her home almost immediately. Madge was to go to her while the newly-married pair were installing themselves at Harborough. Hunting was well on now, there would be that.

Madge had not been out yet. She would go out to-morrow. She had but little heart for it, but she would go. Poor old Simmonds, the groom, would be so distressed if she did not go, such a good meet, and the horses fit to fly out of their skins.

It was a perfect day when Madge rose and looked out of the window next morning, soft

and mild, and no tiresome wind, and she had a delightful new habit.

A little of the joy of life stole back into Madge's veins as her horse Orangeman sailed away over the ridge and furrow fields snatching at his bridle in pure delight. She was rather late at the meet, the hounds had moved on. In her new found pleasure and exhilaration at finding herself once more on a good horse, Madge had forgotten her troubles and greeted cheerily and unaffectedly some of the ladies of the hunt with whom she was acquainted. Was it all imagination, or were they really frigid in their manner, and was it by accident that they mostly drew away from her and addressed some other member of the hunt? Madge told herself that it must be imagination, and that she had dwelt too long on this horrible thing. Then she settled herself down to ride the best run of the season, as far as it had gone, and she rode it with splendid skill and judgment, being well up at the finish.

She hated seeing the fox broken up, and turned away, to the disappointment of the master, who admired her enormously and wanted to give her the brush.

She rode slowly homewards lost in thought, to be considerably startled by a man on a showy

chestnut ranging up alongside of her. A man of the racing, horse-dealing kind, quite on the borderland of gentility, a man whom the men of her world would never dream of inviting to cross their thresholds, a rank outsider in fact, with whom her father had had some slight horse-dealing transaction on one occasion. Madge had never spoken to the man in her life.

"Rippin' day, wasn't it, Miss Harborough," he said touching his hat with his hunting crop, bold admiration in his coarse face, "and, my word, didn't you just show them the way. Nice nag of yours, that."

Madge stared at him in haughty amazement, aghast at the familiarity of his tone. With the slightest possible bend of her head she suddenly turned her horse round and called to her groom.

"Simmonds," she said, "just look at Orangeman's near forefoot. No, he has not got a stone really," she said in a low voice, "but I do not want that man to ride with me."

"Damn his impudence," muttered the old groom, below his breath. "I should think not Miss."

The snub had been so unmistakable that the man, hesitating a moment, rode on cursing coarsely, and taking a good pull at his flask.

Deadly depression settled on Madge's spirits,

succeeded by furious impotent anger. The slights had been meant. What should she do? How infamous it was. Should she throw up everything and join her brother abroad. But then people would say that she was ashamed to show her face, heaven only knew what they might say. There was a good fighting spirit in Madge however. Pride, consciousness of purity and rectitude, all forbade such a course. She would take her own way quietly, she would hunt, as her father wished her to do. Had he not made loving arrangement for her pursuit of the sport that she loved. She would not run away. She would fight. She was in the right. She would go to Mrs. Kerr when she returned, she might be able to help her. And then she dragged herself wearily up to her room and cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

So Madge set her back to the wall and determined that she would go out hunting according to her father's wishes. The fields were large. She would keep herself to herself, she need not talk to anyone, she would invite no more slights.

The old master of the hounds had known her all her life and adored her. He delighted in her fine riding, in her pluck and judgment. He held her up, perhaps injudiciously, as an example to sundry other ladies of the hunt.

"You never see her jumping on hounds and bucketing her horse about," he was prone to remark in and out of season, regardless of any want of response on the part of his hearers.

He was rather deaf, but some slighting remark about Madge had percolated to his dull ears. He turned upon the speaker with blazing eyes. "I don't believe a word of it," he thundered. "You have only got to look at the girl! A damned, cackling, spiteful lot of women!" he bellowed, "and there is her fool

of a mother goes and marries the greatest tabby of the lot, that fellow Glossop. He makes me sick with his fat, white manicured hands. I believe he paints his beastly nails pink. Pah!"

His hearer took refuge in a sulky silence.

"Well, dear, you need not bellow at me," said his wife, a quiet little stay-at-home woman, as he stamped up and down the room one evening after getting home, full of what he had heard. "I have never said anything about Miss Harborough, nor should I believe anything. She is as good as gold I am quite sure, but it is a spiteful world, and she may have done something imprudent that spiteful people have got hold of."

"Imprudent be damned!" bellowed her husband. "She has never done anything at all! She is beautiful, bless her sweet face, and some hag, male or female, has started some hare about her out of spite. If it had been that jade, the Peacock woman, that they always had hanging about!" and he grumbled away down the long passage to his room.

Madge intended to hunt her way over to Mrs. Kerr's, after that lady's return, the hounds being in that neighbourhood that day.

"Good morning, my dear," said the old master, going out of his way to greet her as she

rode up to the hunt. "Delighted to see you out. I wanted to give you the brush on Thursday, but you slipped away."

The tears were not far from Madge's eyes, the kindly looks and words of the old man were so grateful to her wounded spirit. "Thank you so much, dear Mr. Boyle," she said. "I hope we are going to have another good day to-day."

"I think we shall; come with me, my dear, away from the mob," he said lowering his voice, "the fox so often breaks at that corner of the covert," and they trotted away.

The day was most enjoyable. A fine grass country and flying fences. Madge rode superbly, but the fox went to ground.

"No brush to-day, Miss Madge," said the master, as she rode up. "I shall not dig him out. Going home? Oh, are you going to Mrs. Kerr? Nice woman, Mrs. Kerr. Give her my respects. Good night, my dear, coming out on Wednesday? that's right. I am glad you are going to Mrs. Kerr, too lonely for you at Harborough."

"What an absurd fuss that old fool makes over that girl," said Mrs. Blank.

"Yes, really, and after all the talk all that one has heard," replied the other.

"Of course one cannot believe all that one

hears, and she has such a charming face, such a good face," said a younger woman.

"There is never smoke without fire," said the first speaker sourly.

"Well, she don't look like that sort of girl," said the younger stoutly, "and I don't believe there is anything against her but spite! Good night, I turn off here. A nasty spiteful cat, that Mrs. Blank, and she cannot afford to throw stones," she said to her husband who joined her, as as they jogged their tired horses homewards.

"No, that she cannot," he replied.

"It is delightful to have you here, Madge," said Mrs. Kerr, as the tall, slim figure in perfect riding attire entered the charming old drawing-room at Merriton. The parrot chuckled and executed an ungainly dance on his perch. "Will you have tea now, dear, and get out of your riding things afterwards and have a bath and a rest? Your maid and luggage arrived an hour ago; we shall be quite alone this evening, so we can have a good crack after dinner, as we say in the north."

"Delightful," said Madge, "if I am not too muddy to sit in this delicious room."

It is a beautiful face, thought Mrs. Kerr as her guest left her to carry out her comfortable programme, but she has grown to look so sad,

almost stern, like a young goddess. I only trust that I may be able to help her, poor darling. I feel sure that Mr. Glossop has been making mischief.

The two ladies settled themselves comfortably before the fire after an excellent little dinner. Mrs. Kerr was no believer in that horrible anomaly dear to the lone female, the "high tea."

"And now Madge, we will talk it all out," said her hostess. "Did anything happen abroad?"

"Quite enough happened abroad to have finished me it seems," said Madge gloomily. "I shall not spare that wretched creature, Viva, why should I? I will tell you the whole hateful thing. Why it never occurred to me before that this was at the root of it all I cannot conceive. I suppose I must be extra stupid. Of course it is Mr. Glossop who is to blame, with his deadly tongue."

And she told Mrs. Kerr the whole story. Of Viva's disgraceful entanglement with the chauffeur, of her subsequent terror as to the ruin of her worldly prospects, of the man's threatened exposure and his extortion of blackmail, and of Mr. Glossop's disastrous appearance on the scene as she was handing the

scoundrel the notes and gold, also of the gross disrespect of the attitude of the man.

Mrs. Kerr groaned in spirit. "Of course you ought never to have seen the man Madge; it was most imprudent of you, more than quixotic of you."

"What could I do?" said Madge, "the poor wretch of a girl was in such a state, she was frightened to death of the man and did not know what he might do. Of course I was an utter fool to put myself in such a position, but you see it seemed as if Viva's whole future was at stake. There was this rich man, evidently in earnest, and she had made such a mess of things all through it looked like a last chance. Of course I ought to have thought a bit instead of hurling myself into the breach, but you see the brute was to be there, that evening, there seemed to be no time to lose if she was to be got out of this awful mess."

"It is terrible," said Mrs. Kerr, " a most horrible *impasse*. Mr. Glossop is one of the most malevolent men I have ever come across, and what makes him so dangerous is, that it is not the things that he actually says, but the things that he leaves unsaid that are so damaging. I suppose you did not keep the letters?"

"Yes I did, I was going to destroy them, but somehow I did not, and chucked them into my despatch box where they are now. Needless to say, that I never got my £20 back. No, I never see Viva now; I think she is afraid of me, and her husband is grossly rude to me. He is a loathsome bounder. I dare say Viva has told him some lies about me."

"I should certainly keep the letters," said Mrs. Kerr. "Show me the man's letter, if you don't mind, I don't want to see Mrs. Peacock's effusions."

Madge fetched the whole correspondence, which had reposed at the bottom of her despatch box from that day to the present one.

"I think I will go to bed now, dear Mrs. Kerr, we had rather a hard day; you can lock those things up or put them into the fire when you have looked through them."

Mrs. Kerr sat far into the night thinking, thinking, thinking.

Nothing could exceed the gravity of the situation. She knew her world. Its callousness, its readiness to accept evil report. The fatal ease with which a fair name can be tarnished, befouled, never quite to recover its fairness. The hideous injustice of it all! It was insufferable that Madge, exquisite, crystal

pure Madge, should be exposed to such slights, and from women who were not fit to tie her shoe-strings, and this for the sake of a worthless woman, a woman who was bound to come to grief sooner or later from all that one heard. But what could be done? There was Lady Oglander, she would go to Lady Oglander, she would make no bones as to exposing Viva. It could do her no harm considering the disgraceful stories already rife as to her doings.

But Lady Oglander was only one of a crowd. A stupid woman too, though kind enough; one of those women who always seemed to be thinking of something else when you talked to them. The duchess! Would the duchess be likely to do anything to help? They were all such snobs hereabouts, they thought much of the duchess's favour and countenance, but could it be worked, and how? The duchess respected Mrs. Kerr and had shown signs of a modified and frosty liking for the woman who never kow-towed to her or toadied her. Mrs. Kerr gathered the papers together and locked them up. It was nearly one o'clock, she must go to bed. Her movements disturbed the parrot in his slumbers.

"Damn it all," he muttered hoarsely.

"I quite agree with you," said Mrs. Kerr.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Mrs. Kerr was not a woman to allow the grass to grow under her feet. The rot must be stopped if possible, which I doubt, she said sadly to herself, for she loved Madge, and had gone very nigh loving her father at one time, the warmer feeling subsiding into a tender and lasting friendship.

A note to the duchess asking for an interview on a matter of importance obviated futile calls, for her grace's portals did not readily unfold to the outside world. The duchess, however, as we have seen, liked and respected Mrs. Kerr, and more than once a panting and resentful servant had been sent running after Mrs. Kerr's retreating carriage, her grace not having been "at home" to visitors in general, but pleased to receive Mrs. Kerr in particular.

"I am afraid that I have come on a disagreeable errand, duchess," said Mrs. Kerr, the usual greetings over, and a stern "not at home" enjoined on the groom of the chambers.

The duchess stiffened. "I have really had so many calls of late, Mrs. Kerr, that I do not

think that I can possibly——" she began.

Mrs. Kerr's delicate lip curled. "Oh, I do not want a subscription," she interrupted smiling, "it is on a very different and far more painful matter that I have come to you for help. There are times, duchess, when a woman in such a position as yours can be of inestimable help and I want your help in setting right a most cruel wrong, a wrong that I am sorry to say has originated in the conduct of your niece Mrs. Peacock."

The duchess loved her position. Mrs. Kerr could not have opened her case with greater tact. The duchess considered that her position demanded infinitely more consideration and deference than was accorded it in these hateful radical days. She also disliked her husband's niece, Mrs. Peacock, who had given her endless trouble, and whom she strongly suspected of laughing at her.

Mrs. Kerr proceeded, but we will not bore our readers by a repetition of the unpleasant story.

The duchess was a vulgar woman, but she was not devoid of considerable kindness of heart, not an unusual combination by any means, by the way, and she was filled with disgust and anger by Mrs. Kerr's plain and unvarnished

tale, related though it was with delicacy and reserve.

"And do you mean to say that she never paid back that £20?" she said, seizing characteristically on what was to her a salient point.

Mrs. Kerr smiled. "That did not matter so much to poor Madge, though £20 is £20. The question is, can nothing be done to help the girl, for as a woman of the world, duchess, you will see that matters will go from bad to worse if this dreadful thing is allowed to become an *idée fixé*, to crystallise in people's minds. She has been slighted here in her own county, and by such a woman as Mrs. Blank among others. I can assure you that it makes my blood boil. Her fair fame will be for ever smirched if nothing is done. Of course I need not point out to you that that dangerous man Mr. Glossop is at the bottom of it all; I have every reason to believe that he greatly admired Madge, and that he wanted very much to marry her, but she could not abide him and snubbed his advances, and made a deadly enemy of him, and he will never forgive her, but dear duchess you know Mr. Glossop and his pretty ways."

The duchess was silent for a moment. "Yes I know Mr. Glossop," she said in her slow drawl. "The question is, shall I continue to

know him, after what you have told me? The whole story is most painful, but I do not see what I can do."

"Your position is so weighty, and in this neighbourhood your influence is boundless even in these radical days. Everyone knows how particular you are, how strait-laced as to behaviour and conduct. Could you not, so to speak, take Madge by the hand, somehow? You see, if I may say so, she has a strong claim, though she would scout such an idea with her high and mighty notions, and indeed she would be very much displeased did she know of my errand here to-day. You see, that but for her generous and most mistaken act for which she is paying such a cruel price your niece's marriage to Mr. Peacock would never have taken place, that blackguard, your ex-chauffeur, would have made her name a by-word and she never could have shown her face in society again."

"The whole thing is perfectly abominable," said the duchess. "Let me think what I can do. Shall I drive her to the next meet of the hounds? Ah! How would this do? Will you and Miss Harborough come and stay here for the hunt ball? There are some nice people coming here for it, and I will do what I can that might be useful."

Mrs. Kerr rose. "Thank you," she said. "I feel sure that it will help poor Madge quite enormously" (people are so vulgar), she said to herself. "I am only so sorry to have had to come to you with this odious story, but a duchess is such a great card to play," she said smiling.

The duchess purred.

"You see Madge has no one to help her, she is singularly alone and defenceless, her mother has never been like a mother to either of her children. It is strange that they should have turned out so well."

"What a woman," said the duchess. "And to think of her marrying the man Glossop, he so much younger, and she with her grown-up family; almost indecent I call it. Well, good-bye, I shall look forward to seeing you and Miss Harborough here for the hunt ball, I will send you a reminder."

Mrs. Kerr drove away. She had done something at any rate. Now there was Lady Oglander. She must be tackled. So the dear good woman sighed and ran up to London one bitterly cold day, when Madge was out hunting, and lunched with the lady in question.

CHAPTER XXV.

Lady Oglander was a large, dull, excellent woman, with a flock of large, dull, well-behaved and excellent daughters, in whose well being and prospects she was completely absorbed.

"To be seen" where it was advantageous to be seen from the point of view of what is strangely miscalled "the World," to be up-to-date in a dignified manner, with a fashionable vocabulary carefully censored, to be perfectly modern though proper, were the lines laid down by this admirable lady.

Ideas from without percolated but slowly into Lady Oglander's brain, but they stayed there when once admitted, and the brain in question could accommodate but a limited number.

The idea "Was there not something not quite nice, something my dear about a chauffeur," in connection with poor Madge Harborough, had found anchorage there, and Mrs. Kerr felt with despair and rage at her heart that it would never be dislodged.

She had known Lady Oglander for many years, appreciating her solid excellence, and reading her like a book. Lady Oglander, in spite of dulness, was a feature in her own particular stratum of society, she had an immense acquaintance, and she and her girls were to be seen at all the great parties, and the dances, where girls stood in serried phalanx awaiting the pleasure of callow and insolent youths.

At every tea-party of any sort of distinction Lady Oglander was to be met either breathlessly mounting the stairs with an assortment of daughters, or absorbing iced coffee in the tea-room. She had favourite strategic positions at all the garden parties. She always got in her curtsey when any royalty was present. All the linkmen knew her, but an occasional and well-placed sixpence obviated any unseemly if cleverly-veiled chaff.

Mrs. Kerr set forth her case in her own forcible and arresting manner, but she saw that the large pale eyes wandered, the loose-lipped mouth dropped open, and that her winged words found no entry into the small space already occupied. There was nothing more to be done, her train was nearly due. She rose to take leave.

"Well, good-bye dear Mrs. Kerr, so nice to have seen you! Oh yes, and of course we will be kind to Miss Harborough, girls are so troublesome, are they not? Really nowadays they do such things; a girl ran away with a chauffeur only last week!"

Mrs. Kerr groaned in spirit. She paused on the threshold. A bright thought struck her.

"Oh, by the way, are you by any chance going to the hunt ball at X. next week? They say it will be so good this year. Madge Harborough is staying with me, and the duchess has asked us both to stay at Riversdale for it, such a nice party, quite small. I have not been to a hunt ball for such years, I am quite looking forward to it."

Lady Oglander gasped. "You and Miss Harborough?" she asked.

"Yes, it will be so pleasant. Good-bye, many thanks, I must really fly for my train."

Lady Oglander rang the bell. "Ask the young ladies to come down," she said to the butler.

Flying footsteps were shortly heard. Some of the flock were yet young enough to enjoy flying leaps down the last four or five steps.

"Well, Mummy, what is it? Any nice

invitation?" they chorussed; they all talked at once as a rule.

"No dears, no invitation. I want you all to forget what I said about Miss Harborough. People do tell such lies, and there is not a word of truth in that gossip. That nasty woman, Mrs. Peacock, you know, Lord John's daughter, got poor Madge mixed up with some of her own doings."

"All right Mummy, we always liked Madge and thought her a good sort."

"The duchess has asked Mrs. Kerr to bring Madge with her to stay at Riversdale for the hunt ball," said Lady Oglander soberly.

The eldest Oglander girl was rather inclined to be slangy. She whistled softly.

"Don't be vulgar, my dear," said her mother. "We might try and manage to go to it, they say it will be so good. We might make up a tiny party, if we can get rooms at the inn, but I fear it is too late."

So that accounts for the milk in the cocoanut, said the eldest girl as she proceeded upstairs. Good old Mammon!! She had not been through sundry London seasons for nothing.

Mrs. Kerr meanwhile seated herself in a comfortable railway carriage. She was very tired. What a dear, good, amiable idiot of a

woman, she said to herself. There are moments when I wish that I smoked. I am sure that it must be so soothing to strained nerves. What an interview! I am sure she was thinking of Polly's last new gown all the time, or how to get to Lady Twoshoes' dance. However, I have done my best, and I feel that the duchess's invitation may have immense effect. I saw her face change. Dear John Harborough! What would he have thought of it all? His adored Madge! But it never would have happened had he been alive. She leant her head against the cushion of the carriage and went to sleep, only to be aroused at her own station by the faithful guard who had no intention of missing his half-crown, not he!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A HUNT ball is, as a rule, an extremely pretty sight. Nothing prettier in its way excepting the highland balls of lang syne, not one of the modern "meetings" as now accepted, adorned by the presence of Brown, Jones, and Robinson, who have motored in from their respective "shoots," arrayed in the shortest of kilts, capering sky high in the reels, uttering maniacal shrieks, drowning the skirl of the pipes, thudding with heavy feet on the polished floor.

But if it makes them happy, why not? says one who would fain make everyone happy. Certainly! So go it, B., J. and R.!

The hunt ball with which we have to do, however, was a brilliant specimen of its kind. The scarlet coats made beautiful colour, the electric light was perfect, and most of the ladies wore either white or black gowns, in consideration of the coats in question.

Never had Madge looked better. The warm pallor of her skin, the deep eyes, the straight brows, the perfect form, tall, slender, and

graceful. The classic head poised proudly on the long slim throat. She made a distinct sensation as she entered the ball-room with the duchess and her party. She was dressed in softly clinging black, which threw up the ivory of her neck and arms, and she wore a collar of pearls, her father's last gift, round her throat, a crescent of brilliants sparkling among the thick masses of her hair.

"My goodness! Look at the Harborough girl! I never took in how handsome she was," said one woman to another, as she passed them.

"Yes, she is certainly very good-looking, but was there not something?"

"Can't be, or the duchess, who is such a prim prig, would not be likely to have her stayin' in the house. I am told she won't speak to the duke's niece now, you know who I mean, the Peacock woman; she used to take her out before she married and I fancy had her hands pretty full. I expect there will soon be an *esclandre* there, Peacock has a vile temper and won't stand much more, and she seems to be quite reckless."

"Poor little thing," said the other, "not much of a bringing up; I used to admire her scarlet hair and white skin and mad spirits; it's a sad world."

The duchess was very magnificent that night.

The best tiara made its appearance, and she blazed with jewels. Mrs. Kerr was also a distinguished figure, with many fine diamonds. She was feeling really grateful to the duchess who had been as good, even better, than her word in holding out a hand to Madge.

The house party was distinguished and pleasant, and all was going well, all were friendly and kind to Madge.

"Dear duchess," murmured a silly, carneying voice, craving notice from the great lady, "what a beautiful girl Miss Harborough is, really quite beautiful, but was there not a little story?" and she smiled inanely, and looked wise with her head on one side. She was the wife of a rich and newly-made peer, who had sold up the owner of an old estate in the county and had sat himself down in it.

The duchess eyed her coldly. "A story?" she said. "There is another name for some kinds of story, and it is spelled l-i-e," and she turned her back upon the discomfited lady.

"I want to introduce you to Miss Harborough," she said to a tall man in a red coat who was standing close by.

"Thank you, duchess, it is what I have been wanting all the evening," said the man smiling.

In the interval between two of the dances

Madge was standing talking to Mrs. Kerr, and was startled by a voice close behind her, a well-known voice.

"Will you spare me a dance, Miss Harborough?" said its owner.

"Clive!" exclaimed Mrs. Kerr. "Where on earth do you spring from?"

"I am staying with Poole," he said. "We were delayed on the road, which is why we are so late. I did not think we should get here at all, that is the worst of motors."

Madge's heart gave a great bound. Clive Delapré again! She had tried to put him out of her mind. He had so disturbed and distressed her. To no other man had she felt so strangely drawn, and he had sought her out so markedly, their meetings had been so full. She would have repudiated the idea, but love for Clive Delapré had assuredly dawned in her breast and a sense of happiness such as she had never yet experienced came to her when with him. Was she glad to see him now? She did not know. He was a fine figure of a man in his red coat, towering over most of the men in the room. Yes, she would dance with him.

Madge danced beautifully, and so did Clive Delapré.

He put his arm round her slender form, and

they glided away. He drew her closer to him. The strange feeling of content with which he always inspired Madge stole over her senses, merging into pure and undiluted happiness, as they danced on and on. Clive Delapré's pulses throbbed madly. He had fought with himself, he had fled from temptation, and it had come to him that this was the one woman in the world for him, and that all that he had heard was a base lie. He looked into the pure beautiful face; he could not doubt her. He would get his cousin, Mrs. Kerr, to help him to meet her to speed his wooing.

He took her down to supper, and they found a quiet corner afterwards in which to sit and talk.

"And how is Jack!" he asked.

"Jack has gone back to Munich for a time. You know that dreadful things have happened to us," said Madge.

"I know. I am very sorry. I hope it does not make you very unhappy," he said gently.

"Yes it does, but I must make the best of it. It will be but for a time I hope. Jack comes of age next year, and then we mean to set up house together, and be happy ever after. We have made all sorts of plans; we shall live at Harborough and travel, and Jack will write his

books, for which we shall collect material in our travels, and I shall help him, and hunt a little. I have learnt typewriting and can do it quite well."

Clive was silent. "A charming prospect, especially for Jack," he said quietly. "You and Jack are all in all to each other, I know, no interloper will ever be allowed I suppose," and his voice shook a little.

A sudden fit of nervousness seized Madge, the colour rose in her fair face. She laughed and rose. "I am afraid I am engaged for this next dance," she said, and they returned to the ballroom.

In the meantime the following little episode had occurred.

The duchess was moving towards the tea-room when a light touch on her arm arrested her. Mr. Glossop! who had elbowed his way through the throng in the wake of the great lady.

"Have you no word for poor Benedict, dear duchess?" he murmured in his silkiest tones.

"How de do, Mr. Glossop," she said, but with no answering smile, holding out the stout forefinger of a hand already filled with fan, handkerchief and long-handled eye-glass, then she turned her shoulder towards him and began

talking to her neighbour. Mr. Glossop's smile was evil to see, as he fell back.

Mrs. Glossop had declined to accompany him to the hunt ball, or to get up a party for it.

"Why should I?" she said, "Madge is not at home, and I am sure that I do not want to go to hunt balls for my own amusement."

"Perhaps I might say that you might go for mine," said her husband. "I have not got beyond the age when balls amuse," he said pointedly.

Mrs. Glossop coloured painfully. She had already begun to realise her mistake in having married this man. He had a cruel tongue; he made her wince. His cloven foot had appeared. He meant to rule absolutely, to take all power out of her hands on the plea of saving her trouble. He had already initiated economies distasteful to her; he turned up his nose at her friends.

"You must have played your cards very badly not to have got on intimate terms with Riversdale all these years," he said. He was extremely annoyed when he heard that Madge and Mrs. Kerr were staying there for the ball.

"I do not know what you mean," said his wife. "I am not going down on my knees to any one."

"Well, I shall go to the ball without you," he said. "I shall meet many friends I have no doubt, and it will be more amusing than this deadly dull place," he said coarsely.

He raged inwardly. His schemes as to society would never be realised. He could make nothing of his wife. She had suddenly become an old woman, quite an old woman, he thought with intense disgust, and she had quite collapsed as regards making any effort as to society. She kept moreover a tight hand on the pursestrings. It was damnable, utterly, unspeakably damnable, and he fumed all the way to the ball.

"Your mother wishes to know when you intend returning to Harborough," said Mr. Glossop to Madge later in the evening. How handsome she was, he thought to himself, and how he hated her.

Madge tried not to show the distaste she felt.

"I will write to my mother," she said, "I am going to stay over Sunday at Mrs. Kerr's."

"I suppose I must not ask for a dance?" he said.

A sick feeling came over Madge. "I am quite filled up," she said. The horror of it, she thought, and moved away with an expectant partner.

A mad "John" Peel gallop and the X. ball was a thing of the past. The multicoloured crowd streamed away to carriages, motors, buses and flies, and everyone said what a good ball it had been, and chaperons subsided into well-earned slumbers, and sometimes under cover of the darkness a little hand found its way into a larger hand, and the man in the moon looked on and smiled.

Madge lay in her white bed. Sleep was far from her eyes. There was no mistaking Clive Delapré's feeling for her. A great wave of happiness surged over her. No, there could be no mistake, and he was to spend Sunday at Mrs. Kerr's.

She closed her eyes and lived the evening over again, the blood tingling in her veins.

But, dear reader, is there not always an imp waiting to torture us, often in our best moments? The imp was there, watching and waiting his opportunity, and it came, and he sprang upon Madge's shoulder and whispered in her ear, and this was what he said. "Clive Delapré saw that you were staying with the duchess, and therefore he has passed you, my dear! The duchess has passed you, so you must be all right and worthy of his further attention. He

dropped you like a hot potato after the London season, and fled from you in Scotland, but you see the duchess passes you!"

Madge sat up in her bed. Furious anger swept over her. Pride of race, self-respect. The duchess had taken her by the hand, therefore!! She! Madge! Her father's daughter was found worthy. It was unspeakable! The duchess had passed her! Therefore!! The duchess! the duchess!! That middle-class woman, and she Madge, spotless, high-bred, her father's daughter, a Harborough of Harborough!!

He had certainly begun to care for her in London. Madge told herself that she was no conceited fool imagining that every man was in love with her, she was sure of it, and she felt that something had changed him when he came to Mrs. Kerr's. He did care for her, she was sure of it, and again in Scotland. She knew that she was not mistaken, and when they parted he had said how he looked forward to more of such days, and there was that in his manner, in the touch of his hand. And he had fled from her, making no sign, without one word. He had believed these evil things of her, he dared not trust himself with her, for she was not worthy and there was safety only in flight.

But to night!! The duchess had passed her! All must be well!!

Poor Madge writhed and buried her face in her pillow, bitter sobs shook her frame. With maddening iteration she went over it all again, and her agony grew. She would put him out of her mind for ever, she would have nothing more to do with him, to give him the benefit of a doubt never entered her head, she was blind with anger and hurt pride. At last day dawned and she fell into a sleep of utter exhaustion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The visit to Riversdale had been a complete success, as far as it went, now it had come to an end, and Madge went home with Mrs. Kerr to stay over the Sunday. Mrs. Kerr was one of the rare women who never invite confidences that she thinks are withheld, but she feared that all was not well with Madge.

The two women went to church. The last hymn was 499.

> On the resurrection morning,
> Soul and body meet again,
> No more sorrow, no more weeping,
> No more pain.

Madge's lovely voice was good to hear, but at the words "no more pain" she was silent, and Mrs. Kerr, stealing a glance at her, saw her face quiver and the tears standing in her eyes.

Clive Delapré came over to lunch according to arrangement, and was to leave that evening for London. With the tact of an old woman of the world Mrs. Kerr contrived to leave the

pair together. Clive saw at once that all was not well. Madge's manner was cold and distant. She was looking ill, with great rings round her eyes.

"I am afraid you are not well, Miss Harborough," he said suddenly; he was not one to beat about the bush. "What is it?" He drew closer to her. She was standing by the window pretending to play with the parrot. She was silent. A great lump was rising in her throat. She fought with herself. She was ashamed of the effect his voice had on her. "Madge," he said, and his voice was hoarse with deep feeling, "will you marry me? I have loved you ever since I first saw you."

She turned upon him. "Have you?" she said bitterly, "have you? Then how could you have believed the vile things you heard about me? You know you were not sure that they might not be true." He was silent. "Ah! she cried. "You cannot deny it. And because you found that I was staying with the duchess you thought that you would be safe in asking me to be your wife," she cried passionately, "for the duchess would never have invited a girl to stay under her roof who had been guilty of the conduct vile tongues ascribed to me! No, Sir Clive, I will not marry you. I see it

all, and that you have doubted me all along; you were never sure of me until I had been 'passed' by the duchess," and her lip curled in bitter scorn and angry tears stole down her pale cheeks.

Clive was deadly pale; he was completely taken aback. There was nothing to be said. Straightforward and truthful, excuse was impossible to him. He cursed himself for his folly.

"Can you not forgive me, Miss Harborough?" he said. "Is there anything I can do or say that might lessen my offence in your eyes. I can make no excuse for my damnable folly, but believe me that the fact of your staying with the duchess had no effect at all upon me such as you suggest. I never gave it a thought. I am not a snob Madge; will you not think it over and forgive me?" His voice trembled. "Can you give me no hope? I would wait any time you liked; I would do anything," he said, despair in his heart.

She shook her head. She could not trust herself to speak. He took her hand, raised it to his lips and left the room.

Madge burst into a passionate flood of tears.

Clive sought out his cousin. She had a tiny room where she saw people, and rested.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, when she saw his face

of anguish. "Do not tell me that it has gone wrong."

Clive threw himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands. He told her what had passed, nor did he spare himself as to his past wretched doubts and fears. Mrs. Kerr looked grave.

"She is perfectly right," said he. "I am not fit to touch the hem of her garment. I ought to be kicked from the Land's End to John o' Groat's. There is nothing to be done, nothing to be said."

"Oh, Clive, I am too sorry," said his cousin. "I suppose that all that poisonous talk would have put any man off. But Madge! Madge!" she said sadly. "Do you know the rights of it and how the girl's own generosity has recoiled on her own head?" and she told him, showing him the letters Madge had left with her. Clive groaned.

"She will never look at me again," he said. "She thinks that it is because I saw that she was staying with the duchess that I proposed, but at least I am not as bad as that."

"Of course your manner to her when you met here after London was so different, that if I noticed it she would, and naturally she would

have resented it. And then your flying off from Scotland seems to have required explanation.

"I must tell you that I was obliged to leave Scotland that time, a most urgent and worrying affair. I had made up my mind then, however, that I would marry her if she would take me in spite of every lie ever hatched by the foul fiend himself, but I got suddenly ill in London, a bad go of 'flu,' and was completely laid by the heels for weeks. Then I puzzled how to meet her and thought she might be at the X. ball. I meant to propose to her there, but she was so surrounded I thought I should have a better chance here. You know the rest," he said miserably, "now I must go."

"Oh, Clive, I cannot say how sorry I am," said his cousin, "don't give up all hope. She is frightfully proud. Lucifer is not in it with her, but she may come round yet. She is sorely hurt now, but I have an idea that she likes you, dear."

He shook his head, stooped and kissed her, and went.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Back to Harborough. To see Mr. Glossop established there as master. Never to be able to get away from him. It would be unendurable, thought Madge. But she must see if she could bear with it. If not she would go to the family lawyer and see what could be done in the way of living elsewhere. She was of age, her money was at her own disposal. Jack would be of age next year, and then perhaps they could carry out their plan and set up house together, but of course Jack would marry she thought ruefully. I suppose that beast will call me Madge, thought the girl with a shiver of disgust.

Mr. Glossop had already made himself felt. An iron hand under a velvet glove, a tongue like a razor. None of the good old servants remained. Strange faces everywhere, thought Madge, and an odious class of servants. The new housekeeper treated Madge as a guest, meeting her, and asking her if she should show her to her room. Madge stared and the woman retired discomfited.

Madge nerved herself and went down to tea.

Mrs. Glossop was looking ill, and her manner towards her daughter was rather deprecating. The old assertiveness had disappeared, and she glanced timidly at her husband when she ventured on a remark. He had quite taken up a position as master of the house, and his manner to the servants was dictatorial and bullying.

"We dine at 8.30," he said, as Madge rose to leave the room, "it shortens the evenings, which is a great advantage in the country, where one is so cut off."

"Very well," said Madge.

He had not yet ventured on using her Christian name, and his manner was scrupulously polite. He had opened the door for her with a flourish. He is like a thing on the stage, thought Madge. I am sure mother is unhappy, and how dowdy and ill she is looking.

Time went on; disagreeably enough under the new règime. Madge had her hunting, but the zest had gone out of life somehow, and even hunting had lost much of its joy for the girl, and the tears often splashed on her habit during the dreary rides homes after a long day.

Evil days had come to Harborough. Rage and disappointment consumed the interloper,

and he turned his attention towards instituting economies in all directions. There was a curtailment in everything that could be curtailed.

I wonder when he will try it on with the stables, thought Madge, and smiled grimly to herself. The servants hated him, there were constant changes, the service was bad and discontent rife.

The day for the stables was at hand, however.

He had been fully occupied with reconstituting the household and upsetting the gardener hitherto. One day, however, he fancied that he would like to try a ride. Good for the liver, also for the figure, he thought, so with his hat on one side, a cigarette between his thick lips and a very short morning coat, he swaggered down to the stables. He had not been made aware of the separate stable arrangements for Madge's benefit.

Old Simmonds was sitting on the horse-block tying a thong on to a hunting crop. Lazy beggar, thought Mr. Glossop, I shall soon have you out or I am much mistaken. Simmonds rose slowly and touched his hat.

"Here you," said Mr. Glossop, "I should like to ride. I will take a look round and see if you have anything that would suit me."

He walked into the stable and peered into

the loose boxes where Madge's hunters were enjoying a well-earned rest. Mr. Glossop was not at his best on a horse, and he did not fancy the rather fiery-looking 16-hand hunters who snorted and showed the whites of their eyes at him. At last he came on a smart little cob that Madge drove and sometimes rode to covert.

"Ah! that is more like," he said, "saddle him and bring him round at twelve o'clock."

"Sorry, sir, can't sir," said Simmonds. "Can't do it without Miss Harborough's orders. This is her hunting stable and her 'osses. She be goin' to ride this 'ere cob to covert to-morrow."

"What the devil do you mean?" said Mr. Glossop, purple in the face. "Am I master here or not?"

"I don't know, sir," said old Simmonds, "but I be Miss Harborough's head groom, and these be her stables and her 'osses."

Mr. Glossop fumed up to the house and made himself unpleasant at luncheon.

"You have a lot of horses here," he said, addressing his wife, "and I am damned if I can get one to ride. I think that the sooner that brute Simmonds is kicked out the better. He does not seem to know his place or who is master here."

Mrs. Glossop flushed painfully. "I am sorry," she said.

"Excuse me," said Madge looking very pale and stern. "You have made a mistake. Simmonds is my servant, the horses you saw are mine, the stable is mine, and of course Simmonds would do nothing without my orders. Perhaps my father's lawyers had better write to you on this subject, my father made this arrangement for me. Will you excuse me, mother," and she rose and left the room.

Mrs. Glossop burst into tears. Her husband completely lost his temper, and showed himself in his true colours, despicable, low-bred, devoid of all the feelings of a gentleman.

He received a pretty sharp and explicit communication from the family lawyers which did not tend to improve his temper, and his bitter tongue made Madge wince for her mother's sake.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Things went from bad to worse. Madge breakfasted and had tea in her own rooms, seeing as little as possible of her stepfather. I do not think that I can go on with it, said Madge to herself, I must tell mother so. Waiting her opportunity she sought out her mother.

Mrs. Glossop was in her bedroom lying down. She was looking very ill and had evidently been crying.

"Mother," said Madge, "I think it would be better if I were to go away and live somewhere else. You see how Mr. Glossop dislikes me, and it is really almost unbearable at home now, and I feel that I cannot stand it," and her voice broke. "Mr. Glossop talks at me at all the meals, and I saw the butler snigger. It is more than I can bear. Mr. Fraser will arrange things for me. I dare say Mrs. Kerr would let me have her cottage. I should be close to her and the horses could stay here and come over."

Mrs. Glossop burst into tears. "Oh, Madge,

do not leave me! I am so ill! I have been putting it off, but I really must go up to London and see a doctor. I feel sure that I ought to go. There is something very wrong with me. No, I cannot explain. I want also to see Mr. Fraser. Don't cry, Madge. It upsets me so, and I do not know why you should cry for me, I have not been good to you, Madge," and she began to sob hysterically.

Madge took her mother's hand in her's and tried to soothe her.

"Will you come up to London with me, Madge? Ferdinand is going to Paris for a bit. He hates this place and says that he cannot stand it, and he has some sort of business to see to in Paris. He wishes us to settle in London early this year, so there is the town house to see to. You will help me Madge, will you not? for I really do feel so ill," she sobbed miserably.

Madge succeeded in calming her at length, and sat with her until she seemed inclined to sleep.

Nemesis had indeed overtaken Mrs. Glossop, and the poor, vain, selfish woman felt that she had no one now to cling to but the daughter she had neglected and to whom she had never shown any affection or motherly feeling in all

her life. Our sins do find us out sometimes even in this odd world.

And how was it with Madge? Did she regret Clive Delapré? It is certain that he was never far from her thoughts. She would not allow that she repented her refusal of him, but she had begun in her own mind to make excuses for him, and a sick feeling came over her that she had lost the best chance of happiness that was ever likely to come her way. She was very unhappy. She was miserable at Harborough; it was an Inferno. She loathed Mr. Glossop. She would have been superhuman had she felt any strong affection for her mother, but her warm and generous heart went out to her in her distress, and a very passion of anger shook her when, as often happened, she was forced to listen to the covert sarcasms and insults heaped upon the wretched lady by the base hound she had married. Madge would have sacrificed anything to help her, and Mrs. Glossop began to cling to her daughter as a drowning man clings to a spar.

Mother and daughter carried out their plan of going up to London together; the hateful interloper, shaking the dust of Harborough from his feet, betook himself to Paris. He should join them in London when they were

settled in the town house, he said. They could let him know. Madge inwardly determined that said settling in should take some time.

It seemed now as though Mrs. Glossop could hardly bear her daughter to be out of her sight.

I can't see where I come in, thought poor Madge as she sat for a long hour in the car outside the lawyer's chambers in Gray's Inn. I wish I had thought of bringing a book. What a curious dim old place it is, nothing but sparrows and men in black coats hurrying about. Mrs. Glossop at length emerged rather flushed but smiling. She was accompanied by the old white-haired lawyer whom Madge had known all her life.

"Ah, Miss Madge," he exclaimed, "when are we to do a little business for you?"

Madge blushed. "I am going to be an old maid and have a parrot and a cat," she said.

"Now for the doctor," said Mrs. Glossop as they drove away. "I hope he may be as satisfactory," and she sighed.

The visit to the doctor was also lengthy. Madge spent a rather anxious hour turning over magazines and picture papers in the waiting room. Those dreadful waiting rooms! If the walls could speak what harrowing tales they could tell.

The doctor came out with Mrs. Glossop and greeted Madge. His face told no tales. "Your mother has all my directions, she will require to follow them absolutely," he said. "Good morning," and he touched their fingers with his long cold hand.

"Madge," said her mother, as they seated themselves in the car, "I really do not know what your stepfather will say; I am to lead practically an invalid's life for some months to come, and my dear, I may have to undergo an operation."

Madge turned pale and uttered an exclamation of horror.

"It cannot be helped," said her mother, "and after all every other woman one sees has had to go through an operation of some sort or other. I am afraid Ferdinand will be dreadfully put out. He intended to give dinners and what he called get people together, and that will be quite out of the question for me, I must keep early hours and have a nurse. He will hate it," and tears came into her eyes.

"I really think that is a very minor matter compared to your health," said Madge flushing angrily; the unutterable beast, she said to herself.

CHAPTER XXX.

Two women sat in an opera box at His Majesty's Theatre. Their attendant squires had left them to seek refreshment, cigarettes, or pastures new. There were younger and fairer women galore in the house that night, and diamonds blazed, fans waved, bright eyes glanced and sparkled. The *entr'acte* was long.

"Dreadful show up about the Peacock woman, is it not," said one woman to the other.

"Yes, disgraceful. I do not know how many co-respondents there are, they say she is too brazen about it."

"The Peacock man is certainly a horrid brute, if that is any excuse, and I hear he means to drag as many people as he can into the case, and throw as much mud as possible."

"She is a horrid little thing," said the first speaker, "but what can you expect with such a mother? I know the K.C. who is defending, he will get me in, I shall go and look on."

"Oh, shall you? I think those things are so disgusting; they make one feel so ashamed,

and they do so much harm to our class, particularly nowadays."

The other woman shrugged her shoulders. "Human nature in all its phases amuses me, and such odd things come out in a court of law."

The curtain went up and their men returned.

So Viva had succeeded at last in "throwing her cap over the mill," to translate the odd figure of speech of our neighbours across the water, and Mr. Peacock brought an action for divorce.

He had grown to hate his wife, with also a savage hatred for the class to which she belonged, and he determined to drag her through the mire, and that the case should be abominable and glaring in its exposition of shameless vice.

He had spared neither money or pains in collecting evidence. Detectives had been set to work, and that much of the evidence would be proved to be worthless he did not care. It would all pile up, and add to the foul heap and some of the mud would be sure to stick somewhere.

The chauffeur, Jack Gibbs, was to be cited. Here we may say that Viva was perfectly innocent beyond the disgraceful folly of her youthful days, which had cost Madge so dear.

The man had had the impudence to call at Mr. Peacock's house in the hope of extracting money from Viva. Mr. Peacock had seen him sitting in the hall and had remembered his face at Lapoule, where he had been furiously angry by the man's stare at Viva during a block of cars and carriages in the drive. Mr. Peacock never forgot a face. There must have been something, or what was the fellow doing here? That Harborough girl was in it! A dim recollection came over him. He would drag her in. He hated her. He set his detectives to work. There was enough to go upon. Viva had been insolent when he taxed her.

Madge's distress was terrible. She flew to Mrs. Kerr.

"Never mind, my dear," said her friend. "I am not at all sorry that it should all come out." She did not tell Madge that she had been to the lawyer and had laid the nasty little incriminating documents before him.

"It is too hateful," sobbed Madge. "To think that I should be dragged into a divorce court."

CHAPTER XXXI.

The day arrived. We will not enter upon a detailed account of the unsavoury case beyond where it affected poor Madge. We will not dilate upon the atmosphere, the local colour, the crowd, the smart women who had come to seek for sensation and amusement in the shame of a sister woman, whose salt they had eaten, whose hospitalities they had accepted, and whose downfall they anticipated with unwholesome thrills of excitement.

Tall and stately Madge entered upon her ordeal as witness.

"Have you seen this man before?" asked the lawyer indicating Gibbs.

"Yes, once," said Madge.

"When and where?" asked the lawyer.

"I would rather not say," said Madge.

The lawyer passed his hand before his mouth to conceal a smile. The chauffeur looked at Madge and smiled impudently.

"I am afraid that I must insist," said the man of law."

"I saw him at Lapoule on behalf of Miss

Riversby, whom he was trying to blackmail. She had no money, and she begged me to help her to get rid of the dirty scoundrel," said Madge angrily, irritated by the fellow's impudent smile. "I took him the money; it was £20."

"Was anyone else present at your interview with the man?" asked the lawyer.

"No one, but as I was handing the man the money Mr. Glossop brushed past me on his way to the hotel."

"Are you sure that it was Mr. Glossop?"

"Perfectly certain. He paused and turned and looked at me. There could be no mistake. I saw him as clearly as I see you."

A murmur ran through the court.

All was now made clear as the daylight that struggled to get into the court, and a hum of admiration ran through the crowd as Madge, flushed and in evident distress, left her place. Her ordeal was over.

"And that is the girl about whom the most detestable lies have been spread," said a man to a very smart woman sitting beside him. "Upon my word, you ought all to be ashamed of yourselves," he added.

The woman blushed through her paint. "I quite agree with you," she said, "but how about Mr. Glossop?"

"Nasty beast. I have always wanted to wring his neck; he ought to be cut by everyone. Of course it was he who put the lies about; I believe he had a spite against her. It is all quite clear. Well, I am going now, I have had enough of this show. Good-bye, I suppose you will stay on, the spiciest details are to come, I fancy; it would be a pity to miss them," he sneered.

Mr. Peacock got his divorce. Viva showed no signs of shame. Quite the reverse. One of her women friends went to see her, avowedly to condole, really to see how she took it.

She found Viva smoking a cigarette, attired in a suit of silken pyjamas. She executed a *pas* when her friend appeared.

"I am delighted, my dear," she said. Never was there such a beast as Peacock. I am thankful to be rid of him. I have had about enough of the holy estate of matrimony. Holy Estate!! I am not going to marry any of the crowd. Don't pretend to be shocked. Fancy that beast raking up Jack Gibbs! There I am Immaculata! I swear it! Poor Madge, how she hated it all! She is a real good sort. Now I shall enjoy myself and have a real good time. Hang Society! It always made me yawn my head off. I have got plenty of money, poor dear Dad left me all his. *Vogue la galere!!*"

CHAPTER XXXII.

The funny little "world" was now at Madge Harborough's feet.. Invitations poured in upon her. The most strait-laced of dames in society made much of her. The most flattering things were said of her, portraits of her appeared in picture papers, a royal princess commanded that Madge should be presented to her. A hat was named after her!

Madge did not go out very much. Her mother's health precluded all society as far as she was concerned, and Madge flatly refused to go out with her stepfather. There was, however, no lack of suitable chaperonage offering when occasion demanded, and Madge's fair face was to be seen here and there in opera boxes, at great parties, and an occasional ball.

People seem to tumble over each other after me now, said Madge to herself with a grim smile. Her head might well have been turned had it not been screwed on very firmly in the right way.

Mr. Glossop's star had waned, however.

Hard frost reigned where the sun had shone on him before. He was obliged to descend in the social scale, to a lower stratum, where he could still impose upon his audience with stale tales and intimate historiettes, interlarded with great names. Even here he sometimes met with rebuff and slighting inattention.

It had been impossible to keep the newspapers out of his unfortunate wife's hands, and disgust filled her as she read. There were comments too in the gossiping press and she realised how far his spite against her innocent daughter had carried him. All this did not tend to improve her health, poor woman, and as time went on she began to lose hope, and a deadly indifference and absence of any wish to recover militated gravely against her.

The dreaded operation was decided on, but she sank under it and died with her hand in her daughter's.

A sad little procession had returned from the family burying-place at Harborough. Jack and his sister, pale and red-eyed, Mr. Glossop in immaculate weeds, as he flippantly called them to himself. No kindly feeling had stirred his heart as the woman he had deluded and ill-treated was laid to her rest, only a qualm as to whether she had done the "right thing," as

he called it, considering the amount of money he had saved her, and how much she had in her own power to bestow by will. Perhaps he had not been careful enough in his behaviour to her, patient enough with all her trying ways, her nonsense and her rubbishing friends. However, we shall see, he said to himself uneasily.

Poor Mrs. Glossop's last will and testament was very short and much to the point, the gist being that all that was in her power to leave was left to her dear daughter Madge, "who has much to forgive." There were a few trifling legacies, but Mr. Glossop's name was not mentioned.

Livid and speechless with anger he left the room. With infamous taste he reappeared later attired in a light tweed suit announcing to the brother and sister that he was going up to town.

"Where would you like the remainder of your things sent?" said Jack curtly. "The town house is shut up."

"I am taking all my possessions with me," said Mr. Glossop, "and I am glad indeed to have done with Harborough and its belongings." He cast a look of venomous hatred at Madge and departed out of the house and this story.

"I should like to get rid of the whole of these servants," said Jack to his sister next morning.

"That cringing butler makes me sick, and the housemaids are so dirty and impudent-looking; could we not get some of our old lot back?"

"Difficult," said Madge, "but we can give all this lot a month's warning; you can tell the butler and I will ask the housekeeper to come here, she is a detestable woman too."

"Yes, Miss, certainly Miss, indeed I had no intention of staying on, this is such a very dull place," said the housekeeper. "We all find it so, so different to what I have been accustomed."

"Thank you, you can go now. Kindly give all the other women notice also," said Madge.

"Women indeed!" said the woman, tossing her head, as she rustled away.

"What shall we do, Madgey?" said Jack. "Shall we go abroad? It would be rather nice to poke about the old Italian towns, and we can come home in the autumn."

"Yes," said his sister. "Let us, and it will be so uncomfortable here; I think it would be better to go at once and ask Mr. Fraser to send someone down to clear out these servants and lock things up."

So the young pair started on their travels, and on the realisation of their dreams of life and travel together.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Mrs. Kerr was working in her garden. The summer things had gone, the birds were mute, but the robin had sung a tentative little song. Autumn had not yet put forth fiery fingers, but it was getting on that way. Mrs. Kerr was tired and depressed, and tossing aside her tools she made for her favourite resting place in an angle of the wall where a beautiful Penzance briar rose had shed its last blossoms.

No, I do not like growing old, she said to herself, and when one looks back how futile it all seems. Such disappointments, such plans made only to be knocked on the head, such uncertainty, such pain.

What a different proportion things take as the perspective grows steeper and the shadows lengthen. She pulled out her watch.

"Clive ought to be here soon; dear, dear, what a mess he has made of things. Ah, Clive! here you are, delighted to see you, I was mourning over spilt milk, and 'might have beens,' such a stupil thing to do."

"I shall go on mourning over might have beens all my life long," he said.

"Well, my dear, humanly speaking, you will have more time to do it in than I shall," said Mrs. Kerr. "There is such a thing, however, as picking up the pieces."

"You see things are more difficult than ever for me now," said Clive. "I went to that beastly divorce case and when I heard her give her evidence in her beautiful clear voice I felt what a hound I had been, and now there is all that money she has come into. How could I go to her?"

His cousin was silent. "Of course it would be very difficult. All I can say is that if she cares for you, as I cannot help thinking she does, it would be a case of *Tout comprendre, s'est tout pardonner*."

"Oh, my dear Jenny, do not try to raise my hopes," he said, his dark face flushing. "I think I shall chuck my present job and go out to India again and stay there. I can do some good there anyhow."

"Don't," said Mrs. Kerr. "Do not do anything in a hurry, wait a bit, Madge and her brother may be coming home before long, and things may come right. I am expecting to hear from her; I am not quite happy about them.

She said that Jack was not feeling well, and those Italian places are so dreadfully feverish and unwholesome. Come in, I am so tired I must have a little rest before dinner."

Next morning a foreign letter lay on the little heap by Mrs. Kerr's plate.

"Ah!" she cried joyfully, "at last there is something from Madge. I hope it is to say that they are coming home."

She tore it open and as she read her face fell.

"My poor Madge," she said, "how distressing!"

"What is the matter? She is not ill is she?" asked Clive anxiously.

"No, but Jack is. This is what she says," and read him the letter.

"Dearest Mrs. Kerr,

I am so dreadfully anxious about Jack, he is so ill, fever. You know we have been wandering about in all sorts of dirty old towns and came on here to rest and get clean, and look over the treasures we have picked up. I was sure that some of the places were most unwholesome, but he was so interested. He got ill directly after we came here, and the hotel people would not let him stay in the hotel but took him to a nursing home, and

I have got a room close by. It is awful, the loneliness, and the anxiety. The doctor seems clever and is very kind, but he will say nothing decided yet. Of course I can only see Jack at stated hours. It is a nightmare. Pray for my beloved Jack and for me, he is all I have got in the world now.

Your wretched

MADGE."

She laid the letter down. "Poor darling," she muttered.

"Go to her Clive! Go to her!" said Mrs. Kerr suddenly. "I would go but I should be useless. I am not well, and I could not stand the journey. She is alone and so miserable. Jack too is so fond of you there would be nothing odd in your appearing on the scene. No one need know that you had gone out there on purpose. Catch the midday train from here and go on to-night. I will order the car now."

He went.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The crisis had passed. The grim ferryman was bidden to return whence he came, without Jack as passenger. Jack was to be given back to the land of the living, to the sister who loved him.

Madge fell on her knees in the dingy little sitting-room where she had passed such hours of agony. There was a knock at the door. A card was handed to her. Clive Delapré! Would she receive the signore? She tried to still the beating of her heart. Yes, she would see the signore, ask him to come up.

He was shown in by the inquisitive padrona, who lingered outside the door. Bah! these Inglese! What a language. Useless even with one's ear at the door, and she waddled away.

"I was so sorry to hear of your brother's illness, Miss Harborough," said Clive, taking her small cold hand in his. I came to see if I could be of any use. I fear you are having a dreadfully anxious time."

He noted the worn look on the fair face, the stains under the eyes, the droop of the figure, and a great love and pity for her stirred in him, her dimmed and pathetic beauty went to his heart.

Madge tried to speak but words failed her. She put her hand to her throat.

"He is better, thank God," she said at last, in a low voice, "the doctor says that the crisis is past, that he will recover."

Her over-strained nerves gave way, and she broke down. Sobs shook her slender frame. It was almost too much for Clive; a well nigh irresistible longing to take her in his arms seized him, but he put a strong curb on his feelings.

"Dear Miss Harborough," he said, "pray do not cry," and he took her hand gently in his. "Please God he will do well now, and soon pick up his strength; I know these fevers."

Madge dried her eyes. "So silly of me," she said, "but I have had such a dreadful time."

The old feeling of comfort and satisfaction induced by Clive's presence was stealing over her.

"Do you get out at all?" he said suddenly, as he noted with a pang the pallor of her face.

"It is pretty stuffy here," and he looked round the horrid little room, with the dusty red velvet furniture, the fly-blown mirror, the faint fusty smell of dirt and orris root.

"Wont you sit down?" said Madge. "Oh yes, but I only go to the nursing home and then I take a cab. I do not like walking alone here, and I did not bring my maid. I tried it once but it was not pleasant. Some of the people are so horrid," and a little shiver of disgust ran through her at the recollection.

"But you ought to get some fresh air," said Clive. "Will you come out now with me? I will cope with any horrors," he smiled. "There is not a creature here I should think that you ever saw before; we will take a cab to the Boboli Gardens or the Cascine, or stroll down the Lung 'Arno. You really ought to get out, or you will also fall ill."

"Yes," said Madge, "I will come. I shall not be a moment."

It was a wonderful walk. It all seemed so natural, thought Madge. His tact was extraordinary. Not a shade of awkwardness appeared in his manner. They fell back into the old delightful relations of the last London season and that happy day in the highlands.

He left her at her door. "Perhaps Jack may

like to see me soon," he said. "I shall come for you, however, to morrow, and take you for a walk, if I may?"

"Oh, thank you," said Madge simply, and they settled an hour.

The days flew by. Was it all a dream? thought Madge. Never had such a sense of happiness pervaded her. Jack had been delighted when his friend was allowed to pay him a visit, and his recovery was advancing *a grand pas* said the doctor.

Madge was sitting in her fusty little sitting room one morning wondering whether Clive would come. They had not settled anything the evening before, she remembered. Perhaps he would not come. The fat padrona bustled in. The signor Inglese was below, was the signorina receiving? Yes the signorina would receive the signore.

He came in. He always made the little room seem so small and common. He laid his hat and stick aside.

"I have come to say good-bye, Miss Harborough," he said. "I am quite happy about Jack now, and the doctor says you and he will soon be able to make a move."

A hand of ice seemed to clutch Madge's heart.

"You are going away?" she said, trying to speak naturally.

"Yes, I am thinking of going back to India, but I shall have to go home first to arrange things."

Madge was silent; she could not speak. His eyes were on her face. He devoured every line of it.

"I am thinking of going off to-night," he said.

What did he see in her face? Something, for he took her little hand in his and made as though he would draw her towards him.

"Shall I go away? Shall I go to India, Madge?" he whispered, "or shall I stay?"

There were tears in the clear eyes she raised to his.

"Stay," she said.

By Evelyne E. Rynd.

MRS. GREEN

2s. 6d. net.

British Weekly.

'It is a delightful experience for the critic when he finds a book which he can thoroughly and heartily praise. It is a special pleasure when the book is by a new writer. In this rather undistinguished spring season I have found no book on fiction nearly so good and promising. . . . There are not many wittier or kindlier scribes at work among us, and very few with such a quality of freshness."

World.

'A creation of genuine and well-sustained humour, the "Mrs. Green" papers should not be overlooked by any who at the present season are seeking light literature with plenty of laughter in it.'

MRS. GREEN AGAIN

2s. 6d. net.

Morning Post.

'It is, perhaps, only necessary to say of "Mrs. Green Again" that Miss Evelyne Rynd's new book is "up to sample," and that the now well-known creature of her fancy and observation is as full of humorous perversities and whimsical wisdom as ever. For Mrs. Green, the garrulous wife of "little" Green, the gardener at a country parsonage, is, or ought to be, familiar in every household that cherishes the traditions of English country life.'

Pall Mall Gazette.

'Mrs. Green is as lively, shrewd, and humorous as ever; and her circumlocuted speech, which, however, is never allowed to obscure her train of thought is managed with all Miss Rynd's accustomed deftness.'

BY L. ALLEN HARKER.

MISS ESPERANCE AND MR. WYCHERLY

1s. net and 6s.

"If you want to give yourself a delightful treat get 'Miss Esperance and Mr. Wycherly,' and enjoy every word of it. The book so absolutely charmed me that the moment I had finished it I turned back to the first page and read it through again. . . . I shall read it a third time very soon." —*Truth.*

MR. WYCHERLY'S WARDS

1s. net and 6s.

"There are very few writers who have as much to offer us in the way of distinctive charm as Mrs. Allen Harker. Her new book is a continuation of that delightful work, 'Miss Esperance and Mr. Wycherly.' Miss Esperance is dead and Mr. Wycherly is left guardian to those fascinating boys, Edmund and Montagu. But more fascinating than the boys is the other ward that Mr. Wycherly adopts, by name Jane Anne. . . . We can only hope that Mrs. Harker is going to continue her study of the career of Jane Anne." —*Morning Post.*

MASTER AND MAID

6s.

"For a light, bright and thoroughly entertaining volume, it would be difficult to better 'Master and Maid.'"—*Northern Whig.*

BY L. ALLEN HARKER.

THE FFOLLIOTS OF REDMARLEY.

6s.

"I have just returned from a delightful week-end. . . . My friends with whom I was staying would make any spot happy. 'Ffolliot' is the name of them, and they are the jolliest, most companionable folk in the world. . . . Would you care to meet them all for yourself? Then buy Mrs. L. Allen Harker's new book. It is called quite simply, 'The Ffolliots of Redmarley,' and I pity you if you don't end by regarding every character in it as a personal friend." —*Punch.*

A ROMANCE OF THE NURSERY.

6s.

Mr. SWINBURNE in a letter to the author said: "All the children are flesh and life-like. Paul is something quite new as a study. I quite agree with his view of sums, 'the oftener you add a line up the differenter it comes.' I always find it so."

"I am delighted to see this new edition of one of the most delightful books about children that I have ever come across. It is a charming story, and grown-ups will enjoy it quite as much as the children."—*Lady's Pictorial.*

Works by HORACE A. VACHELL

QUINNEYS' - - - - **1s. net and 6s.**

Acting Version. Paper, **1s. net**; Cloth, **2s. net.**

"A story of the most delightful and charming kind. The novel has an engaging appeal that is irresistible."—*Country Life.*

THE HILL - - - - - - - **6s.**

"So well written as to make the reading of it like listening at the keyhole."—*Times.*

BROTHERS - - - - **2s. net and 6s.**

"A book to love and to live in awhile, and a book which will not lightly be forgotten."—*Westminster Gazette.*

LOOT - - - - - - **1s. net and 6s.**

"There is not a story in the book that is not a rattling good tale."—*Morning Post.*

BUNCH GRASS - - - - - - **6s.**

JOHN VERNEY - - - - - - **6s.**

THE WATERS OF JORDAN - - **6s.**

THE FACE OF CLAY - - - - **6s.**

HER SON - - - - - - - **6s.**

AN IMPENDING SWORD - - **2s. 6d. net.**

THE PINCH OF PROSPERITY - **2s. 6d. net.**

JOHN CHARITY - - - - **2s. 6d. net.**

THE SHADOWY THIRD - - **2s. 6d. net.**

JELF'S. A Comedy in Four Acts.
Paper, **1s. 6d. net**; Cloth, **2s. 6d. net.**

SEARCHLIGHTS. A Play in Three Acts.
Paper, **1s. net**; Cloth, **2s. net.**

THE CASE OF LADY CAMBER. A Play in Four Acts. Paper, **1s. net**; Cloth, **2s. net.**

MURRAY'S SHILLING LIBRARY

Even in these days of cheap books the volumes of these series arrest attention as remarkable. They are Crown 8vo (7½ × 5 in.) in size, well printed, and tastefully bound in red cloth boards—their general appearance, indeed, leaves nothing to be desired.

The following is a selection of the volumes—complete list will be posted on request:

A. C. Benson—THE THREAD OF GOLD.

A. C. Benson—THE HOUSE OF QUIET.

Michael Fairless—THE GATHERING OF BROTHER HILARIUS.

Darwin — ORIGIN OF SPECIES (*Copyright edition*).

W. G. Blaikie — LIFE OF DAVID LIVINGSTONE.

Dean Stanley—HISTORICAL MEMORIALS OF CANTERBURY.

Dean Stanley—SINAI & PALESTINE.

Basil Lubbock—ROUND THE HORN BEFORE THE MAST.

Gordon Cumming — THE LION HUNTER OF SOUTH AFRICA.

Bishop Gore—THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

Admiral Giffard—DEEDS OF NAVAL DARING.

Queen Victoria — A SELECTION FROM HER MAJESTY'S CORRESPONDENCE, 1837–1861. 3 vols.

H. W. Bates—NATURALIST ON THE RIVER AMAZONS.

H. W. H. Hoare—OUR ENGLISH BIBLE.

Novels that should not be missed

5s. net each.

UNDER THE COUNTRY SKY

By GRACE S. RICHMOND

The heroine of this novel embodies those qualities of courage, optimism and devotion which all the world loves to see realized in girls and young women. Her friendships and trials all bring out the charm of her human lovable character.

THE OLD BLOOD

By FREDERICK PALMER, Author of "The Last Shot," etc.

Mr. Palmer has had exceptional advantages as a war-correspondent in the present war—while many of the scenes of his new novel are in France, with a background of war, it is a love story of unusual plot and grows in strength from chapter to chapter.

THE HEART OF RACHEL

By KATHLEEN NORRIS, Author of "Julia Page," etc.

A companion volume, though not a sequel, to Mrs. Norris's widely appreciated novel "Julia Page." The American system of easy divorce and re-marriage is a leading motive in the book, which should prove one of the most appealing of these times.

LIFE AND GABRIELLA

By ELLEN GLASGOW, Author of "The Battle-Ground," etc.

A book of power—of the human mastery of Fate. A tale that will make a profound impression for its sanity, its knowledge of life, and for the gentle, fearless woman who steps out of its pages with the fruits of victory in her hands.

THE WAGES OF VIRTUE

By CAPTAIN P. C. WREN, Author of "Dew and Mildew," etc.

A vivid picture of life in the French Foreign Legion in Algeria. The sayings, the doings, the philosophies and adventures of the last of the mercenaries of the Legion, make it not only a romance but a reality.

MOOR FIRES

By E. H. YOUNG, Author of "Yonder," "A Corn of Wheat"

The four young Canipers live with their stepmother in a house on a moor; and the story shows how the moor affects the characters and lives of the young people. The author's vivid descriptions of the moor at all seasons is one of the triumphs of the book, which in this respect is somewhat reminiscent of Hardy's wonderful "Return of the Native."

THE RISING TIDE

By MARGARET DELAND, Author of "The Iron Woman," etc.

A striking, sympathetic story of the experiences of a charming, headstrong girl who finds herself "up against" most of life's conventions and shams.

HALF A LIE

By LADY NAPIER OF MAGDALA, Author of "Fiona," etc.

The theme of Lady Napier's characteristic novel is concerned with the fact that a lie which is half a truth is a difficult matter to fight.